Looking Beyond the Public Discourses on Migration: Experiences of Bulgarians and Romanians in the UK

Guest Editor:
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A Bulgarian forklift driver working the night shift in London based fruit and vegetable market. © Iulius-Cezar Macarie
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The 1st of January 2017 marked the 10th anniversary of Bulgaria’s and Romania’s EU membership. In neither of the two countries was the event marked by celebrations but instead remained on the sidelines of popular and political interest, as people were most preoccupied with both countries’ efforts to form new governments. The only sign of enthusiasm came from the EU Commission whose representatives congratulated Bulgaria and Romania for successfully advancing to the status of ‘vital democracies’. Liberal international and local media also dwelled on the benefits that the two member states have reaped in the past decade. Stability, improved financial indicators and satisfied populations were amongst the commonly invoked positive achievements at the end of a decade of EU integration.

However, the situation on the ground looks rather bleak: the benefits of EU membership have been distributed unequally, leaving ordinary people under the impression that a handful of politicians, elites and the mafia have been the only beneficiaries of generous EU funding. The past 10 years in both countries saw the continued de-nationalization of state assets, the closing down of industries and the implementation of drastic austerity policies that left more than a third of their populations at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The high social cost of these reforms has led to a collective disillusionment with a long transitional development towards a much desired ‘Western’ life for all. Recent polls confirm this conclusion with reports of growing rates of Euroscepticism in both Bulgaria and Romania, the two countries usually portrayed as the strongest supporters of the EU project.
The blame for the sluggish integration progress of the two poorest members of the EU has been construed in mutually opposing directions. The governments in Sofia and Bucharest continue to exploit the socialist legacy and corresponding inability of the majority of the population to transform their totalitarian habits and mentalities. As expressed in the words of the Bulgarian foreign minister: ‘Ten years are not enough, fifteen years are not either. [...] prosperous, developed European peoples have been amassing democratic traditions and material prosperity for centuries. We cannot catch up with them and we cannot overcome the disgusting totalitarian legacy that has destroyed people’s morality’. Meanwhile, the supposedly ‘backwards’ populations seem to direct their discontent with worsening living conditions towards corrupt politicians and dysfunctional national institutions and less so towards the imposition of EU regulations and the neoliberal restrictions on their countries.

One benefit of the EU accession, on which both working and newly-emerging middle classes agree, albeit for different reasons, is the unrestricted right to free movement. This newly-gained privilege, however, came with an important condition: Bulgarians and Romanians received restricted access to the labour markets of most EU member states, which, as in the case of the UK, directed workers towards the low-skilled sectors of a bifurcated labour market. The UK became one of the two most popular migration destinations (along with Germany) for Bulgarian and Romanian nationals, especially after the 2008 global economic crisis, which negatively impacted movements towards traditionally preferred migration destinations such as Italy, Spain, and Greece. The steady increase in the numbers of Bulgarians and Romanians coming to the UK has marked a new peak in the period after January 2014, when the work restrictions for workers from both nations were lifted. The officially estimated 220,000 Romanians and 69,000 Bulgarians living in the UK at the end of 2015 represent 25% of total EU immigration to the UK, which itself has been on the rise since 2012.

In the public discourse in Britain, Bulgarians and Romanians have been commonly subsumed under the category of East European migrants. The institutional practices and media rhetoric to which they continue to be subjected negatively affect their perceived position in the host society. The imposition of ‘transitional restrictions’ on free movement for the maximum length of seven years can be seen as a reply to the panic produced by the unexpectedly high numbers of A8 workers (especially from Poland) who immigrated after 2004. The postponement of free movement for Bulgarian and Romanian workers was promoted with a political campaign presenting migrant workers both as a threat to the local economy and as potential ‘benefit tourists’, i.e. poor and morally-compromised individuals who try to capitalize on their right to free movement by abusing welfare support and social services in Western EU member states.

Such labels were widely used and reproduced in media narratives that added new nuances to already existing public fears by portraying migrants from the two countries as criminal, culturally inferior and as posing a general threat to British moral and social order. This racialized treatment of Bulgarian and Romanian migrants has led to the reproduction of structurally-embedded inequalities that confine migrants to particular professional positions, legal and cultural categories, all of which contribute to their subordinate social status. The stigmatization of Bulgarians
and Romanians and the corresponding construction of their identity as ‘incomplete’ Europeans limit their capacities for achieving social mobility or even minimal levels of security and living standards when compared to already more ‘settled’ East European migrant communities.

Academic studies, predominantly directed towards ‘the first wave’ of East European migrations (Poles in particular) had so far sidelined the dismal experiences of workers coming from Bulgaria and Romania. When existent, such scholarship has been most commonly informed by a policy agenda and geared towards a general description of the trends and dynamics in an effort to identify possibilities for steering and regulating migration movements. Both in its rhetoric and perspectives, such research has reproduced the value-laden and objectifying categories found in policy and public discourses. Especially in present pre-Brexit realities in which migrants are being used as bargaining chips in EU-exit talks and increased expressions of public animosity are seen by many as legitimate, academic analyses should refrain from the simplistic exploration of migration logics and give a voice to migrants’ own concerns.

The contribution of the present special issue lies in its efforts to shift the focus towards migrants’ actual experiences. The authors give Bulgarians and Romanians the central role of subjects able and deserving to speak for themselves in order to show how their experienced reality is affected by structural, economic and political barriers. Such an approach presents an alternative to the predominant research agendas - as migrants are not treated as ‘flows’ in need of regulation but as individuals trying to deal with the challenges of life in the contemporary capitalist economy. The following contributions reveal realities of discrimination, institutional violence and exploitation that persist despite the granting of full working rights to Romanians and Bulgarians in 2014. Such dynamics of exclusion remain obscured in portrayals of migration in popular discourses where the two groups are unreflectively assumed as integrated into the UK labour market.

Mila Maeva starts off this issue with her analysis of the effects of British immigration policies and tabloid representations on Bulgarians’ practices of settlement in UK society. The author’s revision of the institutional restrictions imposed on Bulgarian and Romanian immigrants under the ‘managed migration’ agenda set out by the British government confirms previous findings on the historical racializing logic of policies that emphasise cultural, social and quasi-biological traits of migrant groups. The immigration restricting measures put in place have not led to a substantial curb on the number of newcomers, but they have had the effect of relegating migrants to the confines of precarious and undesirable segments of the British labour market. The cumulative effects of discriminatory policy and public discourse have provoked suffering and discontent among Bulgarian migrants whose unsupported political struggles for recognition, as Maeva concludes, bear out on their feelings of rejection by both home and host states.

Alexandra Bulat’s article takes a logical further step by looking at how encounters of workplace and general everyday discriminatory attitudes have been experienced by Romanian migrants in several British localities. Instead of condemning stereotypical hegemonic representations of Romanians widely circulating in British
society, Bulat’s informants tend to reproduce them by re-directing them towards those whom they see as ‘low-class’ Romanians and locals. By making use of class-tinted narratives for justifying discrimination as well-deserved by certain types of migrants, Romanians come up with a strategy through which they try to build on their own distinction vis-à-vis the rest of the Romanian community. What makes Bulat’s contribution particularly salient is the fact that she allows for discussion of the less-explored and, as she proves, no less-stereotypical view back – or Romanians’ own narratives and practices of discrimination which they direct not only towards Romanian ‘others’ but also British people.

Polina Manolova’s paper shifts attention towards the invisible institutional mechanisms that continue to impact on Bulgarian migrants’ long settlement aspirations in the UK. The early migration experiences of those longing for a new start in the UK are marked by their entanglement in a bureaucratic closed-circle which along with migrants’ lack of language skills and limited understanding of local legislation often entraps them in the highly exploitative grey economic sector.

The de-facto ‘illegality’ of Bulgarian workers comes into contradiction with the rights stemming from their EU citizens status. As a result of put in place informal institutional regulations, the dual structure of the British labour market and migrants’ normalization of their subordinated social position, pre-migratory hopes for settlement and family re-unification largely evade Bulgarians. Instead many are drawn into a circular labour mobility which is often the only way of alleviating financial burdens inflicted by migration itself.

In the final article of this issue Iulius-Cezar Macarie provides an overarching theoretical reflection on the effects of the post-circadian capitalist economy on possibilities of solidarity formation amongst migrant night workers. His analysis of the transition from circadian to post-circadian capitalism gives an insight into the impact of proliferation of night-shift employment on migrants’ subjectivities. The 21st century ‘world-making’ capitalism with its logic of short-term employment cycles, he claims, has led to unprecedented dynamics of destruction of migrant livelihoods. The grim conclusion that solidarity remains impossible to achieve amongst those treated as ‘purely material objects commodified according to the current political economic interests’ remains particularly salient to Bulgarian and Romanian migrant experiences in the UK.

Polina Manolova
UK Policy Towards Bulgarians and Stereotypes about them since 1989

by Mila Maeva

Abstract
The article focuses on British politics and stereotypes about Bulgarian citizens in the period after 1989. The article is based on a review of official British documents concerning the migration of Bulgarians from 1990s onwards. Various data originating from tabloids from the period 2004-2015 that had an effect on Bulgarian migrants residing in the UK was also explored. The main part of the paper is based on a round of ethnographic field studies of Bulgarian immigrants multilocally conducted in Britain and in Bulgaria. It explores the influence of British immigration policy and media informations on Bulgarian movements and settlement in the UK. The special attention is put on Bulgarian feelings and perceptions of discrimination. The study seeks to answer questions about the effectiveness and appropriateness of British policies and the migrants’ future adaptation and loyalty towards the host country.

Key words: migration, stereotypes, migration politics, discrimination, integration, loyalty.

The problem with the very strong migration movements to Great Britain and the formation of large immigrant communities in the country, especially from Eastern Europe in the last 12 years, provoked a wide public debate during a nationwide referendum on EU membership and especially after the decision for ‘Brexit’ in June 2016. The present study takes a narrower perspective. Its main focus is the situation of Bulgarians in the UK, which has attracted public attention both in Britain and Bulgaria in the recent years. My thesis is that the Bulgarian immigrants’ lives and the attitudes towards them are largely predetermined by the situation in Great Britain. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to examine the policy of the host country towards them since 1989, which has defined the number, status, motivation and employment of the migrants in the new society. Moreover, the British official policy has a great impact on various stereotypes and prejudices regarding Bulgarians, as presented in the British tabloids for the period between 2006 and 2015. All factors mentioned so far have mutually influenced one another. On the one hand, it creates a largely negative attitude towards people coming from Bulgaria, but on the other hand it influences the immigrants’ perception of the new country and its citizens.

This article is based on three sources: A review of official British documents concerning the migration of Bulgarians from 1990s onwards. Various data originating from tabloids during the period 2004-2015 and affecting Bulgarian migrants residing in the UK was also explored. The main part of the paper is based on an ethnographic field study of Bulgarian migrants in Britain. During the study, classic ethnographic methods such as in-depth and semi-structured interviews, participant observation and autobiographical stories of the respondents were applied. The research was multilocal and conducted in different parts of the UK for a period of six years (2007-2013): London (2007, 2010-2011, 2013), Manchester (2010), Birmingham (2007), Chatham (2007 and 2010), Rochester (2010), Tonbridge (2007), Maidstone (2010-2011),...
British policy towards Bulgarian citizens at the beginning of the 21st century is predetermined by the so-called ‘managed migration’ approach. The policy was introduced by the Home Office in 2002 and aimed at turning immigration into ‘immigration, carefully managed to meet particular needs within a particular sector or at a particular skill level, to help to support these policies as we engage the entrepreneurship, drive and enterprise of those who have sought to make the UK their home. It is, however, in those communities least likely to have benefited from added value economic activity and entrepreneurship where the biggest challenge lies’. The policy aims at achieving a positive economic impact and stronger macroeconomic health, giving alternative solutions to retired workers and increasing the natural growth of the population. As spelled out in the documents: ‘Permanent migrants must be as economically active as possible; put as little burden on the state as possible; and be as socially integrated as possible. The overwhelming majority of those seeking permanent settlement are young’ (Home Office, 2005: 21). And since this policy applies only to A2 citizens (Bulgaria and Romania) and does not refer to migrants from A8 (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary and the Czech Republic) and the rest of the EU countries, it could be argued that the logic of discrimination still lies at its heart, albeit in more subtle forms.

According to J. Fox, L. Morosanu and E. Szilassy, the ‘immigration controls against Romanians were not racially motivated, but did produce racialized effects. Romanians were symbolically stripped of their whiteness by an immigration policy that refused to recognize them as full Europeans with the associated rights (and colour) such a status would have otherwise availed them’. The immigration control both Bulgarians and Romanians were subjected to as well as the refusal of the British government to recognize them as ‘full-fledged’ Europeans with all the associated rights undoubtedly reflects the public attitude towards them, which will be discussed further.

The accession of Bulgaria to the European Union on January 1, 2007 marked a new stage in the British immigration policy towards its citizens. Despite the removal of visa regulations, Great Britain continued to impose restrictions on Bulgarians’ labour market rights. This policy was influenced by the unforeseen high migration of A8 citizens (Polish in particular) and the view that vacancies in the UK would be filled by other people from A15, including countries which joined the European Union by 1996 (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Denmark, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Finland, Austria and Sweden).

Because of the new measures Bulgarian citizens had the right to reside in the UK without a visa for a period of up to three months subsequently to which they were required to provide residential and work permits. The British government took advantage of the stipulations of the Accession Treaty of 2005 according to which the country had the right to restrict the labour market access of Bulgarians and Romanians for a period up to seven years. However, Britain selectively opened its market to the self-employed (especially in construction and cleaning sector etc.), students, family members, skilled workers with work permits, low-skilled workers in seasonal agricultural (SAWS) (for six months) and food processing industries (for one year). Through

6 Ibid.


8 The maximum quota of workers from Bulgaria and Romania were 16 250. The SAWS workers carried out low-skilled work including planting and gathering crops; on-farm processing and packing of crops; and handling livestock (Migration Advisory Committee, The Labour Market Impact of Relaxing Restrictions on Employment in the UK of Nationals of Bulgarian and Romanian EU Member State (2008), 55 – 56, accessed December 13, 2016, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/257239/relaxing-restrictions.pdf). The Scheme had existed since the end of 1940. Workers were hired for seasonal agricultural (SAWS), which provided cheap seasonal labor (especially if foreign students) for
that policy, A2 workers were granted exclusive access to the above-enlisted low-skilled schemes that were previously reserved for workers from outside the EU. Gradually the UK started to remove all migration schemes for low-skilled workers from outside the EU and replaced them with low-skilled workers from Bulgaria and Romania. After one year of continuous employment (or five years for the self-employed), the citizens of A2 received a ‘blue card’ and unrestricted access to the labor market. The primary focus of occupational farmers.

14 Jon Fox, Laura Morosanu, Eszter Szilassy,
for work permits for citizens of both countries were visible in the statistics on Bulgarian and Romanian immigration. The figures suggest that by 2004 immigration from both countries included a small percent of highly qualified persons, but the largest share of arrivals received work permits.

Britain maintained its policy of ‘managed migration’ towards Bulgarians and Romanians until the end of 2013. Yet in the early years of the accession of the two new member states the expected immigration ‘epidemic’ gradually shifted to other countries that imposed restrictions on Bulgarian workers (such as Greece and Ireland). The UK was one of the few European countries where fears of Eastern European immigrants had a real legislative dimension, reflected in the closure of its labor market for citizens of Bulgaria and Romania for a period of seven years after their EU accession. The British authorities repealed the labor restrictions on A2 citizens at the last possible moment in January 2014, but the statistics show that long restrictions failed to prevent new moves in that direction.

Bulgarians in British tabloids

Undoubtedly, the policy of ‘managed migration’ reflected on the image of Bulgarians and Romanians in British tabloids. Due to their concurrent EU accession A2 nationals were pictured homogeneously among the public\textsuperscript{15}. The attitude towards the citizens of the two countries in the media affected to the British public views towards them. These can be explained by the high criminality and corruption attributed to Romanians and Bulgarians, as well as the large number of Roma in the two countries who are subject to serious prejudice in Britain. The visa scandal that took place in the British Embassy in Sofia in 2004 confirmed the already existing view that the majority of A2 citizens were trying to cheat the UK system. That view was enshrined in a document produced by the British Home Office in 2006, which warned against the expected arrival of 45 000 criminals from Romania and Bulgaria\textsuperscript{16}. A review of the British media, especially British tabloids, reflects the constant reporting of information about problems with immigrants from both countries. In the 2006-2013 period, these news items remained particularly relevant especially at the end of each year when the British government discussed the possible termination of labor restrictions for Bulgarians and Romanians. For example, for a period of a month in the summer of 2006 a large number of materials collected among those waiting for


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a visa in front of the British consulate in Sofia and Bucharest appeared in British media. While the newcomers’ citizenship was the basis of the above-discussed institutional discrimination in the immigration policy, the discriminatory line followed by tabloids is explicitly based on culturalist perspectives as a motive for exclusion. In British tabloids Bulgarians and Romanians are presented as foreigners and are often implicitly or explicitly associated with racially-stigmatized previous migration waves. The political and economic position of the citizens of A2 defined by the official state policy shows that ‘the new Europeans’ are perceived more negatively in comparison to previous migration waves, regardless of their European identity and cultural heritage. Such policy perspectives undoubtedly affect public opinion and media representations.

British tabloids provide different framings of these views. The first one emphasises numbers of arrivals from the two countries starting from a few thousand up to several million. This is reflected in Nigel Farage’s speech in which he stated that 29 million Romanians and Bulgarians would be expected settling in Britain in the next few years. The numbers are often exaggerated in talks about expectations of floods of Eastern Europeans ‘floods’. For example, Janice Atkinson, UKIP MEP for the South East, said that there were more Bulgarians and Romanians working in the UK than the total population of Folkestone and Hythe. The categories tabloids use (stopping, controlling, blocking) in relation to migrants are directed towards efforts to prevent their movement. These terms are not neutral and represent immigrants in the best case as a nuisance and at worst as a threat. The texts are not openly rude or discriminatory; they rather hint and simultaneously validate assumptions about the relationship between immigration and ‘race’ accumulated from the past.

The narratives directed towards Bulgarians and Romanians vary according to the existing problems in British society. In 2006 multiple articles warned about health problems and increasing death rates caused by AIDS and tuberculosis in the UK. Tabloids described the immigrants coming from A2 as physically dangerous for Britons’ health because of the alleged flood of drugs and prostitutes. From 2007 onwards, when the number of Eastern European migrants in the UK dramatically

increased tabloids changed perspective and presented migration from Bulgaria and Romania as a massive wave flooding the UK labor market and leaving Britons out of work. In the last few months of 2013 they gave a different angle to that problem – so-called ‘social tourism’. Tabloids played with the theme about the newcomers’ possibilities to receive welfare benefits, which would burden the already fragile British social welfare system. Public opinion forced the government to introduce 100 new criteria that the immigrants should meet before they receive income-related benefits such as housing benefit, income support and council tax benefits.28 According to another requirement, newcomers had to earn 149 pounds per week to be eligible to apply for benefits29 – a requirement defined by researchers as ‘chauvinism of prosperity’ (‘welfare chauvinism’, understood as the extent to which people believe that welfare benefits should be restricted to citizens)30. 


permanent discriminatory framework. Publications describe the increased number of crimes in the UK as a result of the free entry of A2 citizens31. For example, in December 2013 ‘The Express’ published information on a Bulgarian who targeted English homes with the comment that this is one important reason to limit the movement of those citizens to the Kingdom32. Finally, it should be pointed out that the language used to describe Bulgarians presents them as a group without considering social differences33. The media reports also talk about associations or overlaps between Bulgarians, Romanians and Roma34, which also caused negative public perceptions35. It should also be noted that tabloids often associate Gypsies with criminal, antisocial behavior or a nomad lifestyles36. Due to public discontent and strong activity of the opposition (especially the nationalist opposition), Bulgarians were constantly humiliated by the extension of labor restrictions
beyond 2013 and this topic was continuously discussed in Internet forums. There was information about Eastern Europeans already settled in the UK who were against the opening of the British market due to fears of falling wages and the arrival of new cheap labor. The migration debate in Britain in that period was so hot that even part of the political messages during the campaign for EU Parliament in 2013 included messages defined as ‘racist’ against Eastern immigrants\(^{37}\). The propaganda against the opening of the labour market for A2 citizens took on an especially negative tone at the end of 2013. An example of this is the statement of the London councilor Nicky Aiken against the beggars in the central part of the capital: ‘The tidal movement of East European rough sleepers in central London is something we have seen for months now... I can totally understand the frustration of residents and businesses that no sooner do we clear an illegal camp than a fresh batch arrive. The longer-term solution lies in stopping career beggars at the UK border.’\(^{38}\)

The migration debate was strongly influenced by the political situation in the UK\(^{39}\). It included many celebrities. The opinion of the famous chef and restaurateur Jamie Oliver stood out among them. According to him, the restaurants would close without the Eastern European immigrants who were ‘tougher’ workers than younger Britons who were described as ‘wet behind the ears’ and easily tired after a 48-working week\(^{40}\).

The above-mentioned aspects form a pattern which presents the people arriving from Bulgaria and Romania as a problem and as responsible for the UK’s problems. Using the terminology of J. Fox, L. Morosanu and E. Szilasi racialization ‘occurs when migrants are collectively disparaged with reference to a combination of cultural, social, and/or quasi-biological traits. This is not the crude discrimination /racism of epithets and insults; rather, innuendo and inference extend them to a larger and growing narrative that attributes the problems of migration to the essential characteristics of the migrants’\(^{41}\).


The effect of British policy and tabloid opinion on Bulgarian immigration and settlement in the UK

The policy of managed migration applied by the British government towards the Bulgarians and the Romanians is aimed at restricting their movement. Statistics from that period show, however, that the number of persons who came from Bulgaria gradually increased during the period after the collapse of communist rule in the country. The data show that the number of Bulgarian immigrants has increased by 382% since 2004 and reached 53’000 in 2011. Other data suggest that there were 47’000 Bulgarians in the UK in 2012 and about 50’000-60’000 in 2013. According to the British National Insurance Institute, 187,961 adult Bulgarian citizens received national insurance numbers between January 2002 and December 2015 regardless of labour restrictions.

Unofficial data from Bulgarian interlocutors, however, indicate that the number of Bulgarian citizens residing (including those who have temporary residence) in the UK exceed.


Figure 2. Number of Bulgarians receiving NINo (2002-2015), Source: Department for Work and Pensions, February 2016.
ed 300’000 at the end of 2016. (the source is – Bulgarian interlocutors; not official info their own estimation).

Despite their influence on the number of immigrants, the British policies undoubtedly also affected the ways in which Bulgarians settle in the country. The period between 1989 and 2015 can be further divided into five main sub-periods. The first (1989-2001) was provoked by the collapse of the communist borders, the opening of the country to the West after 10 November 1989, and the increased interest in travelling and meeting new people and cultures. However, Bulgaria’s transition from a centralised to a market economy with high rates of inflation and unemployment, tighter credit and fiscal policies and low levels of production. They all affected the entire country’s population, resulting in a sharp drop in the living standards and strengthening the desire to emigrate. The removal of visa restrictions regarding travel to most countries in the EU in 2001 undoubtedly gave an impulse to Bulgarian migration. During the period between 2001 and late 2006, many Bulgarians wishing to live and work in Britain became self-employed. The country’s accession to the EU and right to travel visa-free to Britain from 1 January 2007 definitely gave a boost to student and economic migration. The latest wave of migration began in mid-2010 and was stimulated by the economic crisis and market stagnation in Western Europe and Bulgaria. This

led to increased movement from Bulgaria and the relocation of representatives of the larger Bulgarian communities, such as those in Spain and Greece, to the UK. The study shows that in the last few years there were many cases of re-emigration by people who had settled in other European countries like France, Greece or Spain, but changed their destination for political, social or economic reasons. The last period began in 2014 after the abolishment of employment restrictions and the opening of the UK market for the Bulgarian citizens.

British policies also reflected on the ways in which the immigrants settled there. For example, most of the Bulgarians arriving in the 1990s stayed in Britain after the end of student brigades, festivals, concerts or football matches using opportunities for acquiring refugee status and applying for asylum until they fixed their documents:

There was a company that helped us with the documents. It helped us, but everyone invented a story about asylum seeking (AIEM №983-III: 58).

Although the applicants were not real refugees, they took advantage of asylum-granting policies in order to stay in the UK. After the initial rejection, the migrants waited years to appeal. Thus, despite the strict visa regime Bulgarians exploited administrative gaps:

Before being self-employed we all were asylum seekers; we sought refugee status... We won time there. It was a window of opportunity (AIEM №983-III: 59).

At the beginning of the twentieth century Bulgarians directed their efforts towards new legal possibilities to settle in the UK. Since 2001, business visas have become particularly
relevant. This practice was started in mid-90s by various companies, often with Bulgarian and British participation. For a large amount of money the future immigrants received not only the necessary documents to work and reside in the UK, but also good lawyers taking care of potential problems in the British Embassy in Sofia or conflicts with the authorities. The companies prepared immigrants’ work plans and the business development documents in the coming years, sometimes of which were even fictitious.

The student brigades provided a second opportunity to leave Bulgaria after 2001. The narratives told of several cases of departure after false documents for student status were presented. An interesting case was one of students’ who supported a private business in Bulgaria (furniture house) with periodic seasonal agricultural work in England. The student visas provided another possibility in that period. They were obtained after registration in a college for learning or improving English language skills. Generally, the enrolling students received a six-month or one-year visa, but were supposed to submit documents for admission, pay for accommodation and present a bank statement that allowed a longer stay in England:

*I came as a student for three months, then I was issued a six-month visa ... no problem to open a bank account because the colleges work with certain bank branches... I borrowed 11-12 thousand dollars from my friends because I had to prove that I have enough money money to stay in the UK... I deposited it in a bank account, received an excerpt from the account and returned the money back to my friends* (AIEM №983-III: 29).

The narratives showed that immigrants often combine different ways in order to secure their residence in the UK. For example, some of them came as “refugees”. After a certain period, they enrolled in a language course at a college or something else, and then applied for self-employment in order to continue their stay there. The immigrants used all loopholes in the legal legislation, “all sorts of dealings” (AEIM №970-III: 24), often with the help of friends or different companies to survive and to “bypass” the limitations imposed on them by the British government. Therefore, Bulgarian narratives about the arrival in Britain were stories of survival and struggle with British laws and rules requesting “combinativeness and nerves” (AEIM №983-III: 92). Not everyone was lucky. Some were caught by the British authorities as illegal residents or workers and were returned to Bulgaria. Others were not permitted to enter the UK because of doubts about the legality of their visa.

The British policy of managed migration affected the employment status of newcomers too. In this way Bulgarians with Romanians contribute to “improving the efficiency of the labor market” but carry out activities that are avoided by locals for being “dirty,” “difficult” and “dangerous” (known in the literature as 3D activities (“3D jobs - dirty, difficult (dull) and dangerous jobs”\(^47\), low-paid domestic work, unskilled work in the informal sector, and work in sectors with strict seasonality such as agriculture, road building and construction, hotel, restaurant and other tourism-related services\(^48\). Therefore, the Bulgarians


\(^{48}\) Rayner Münz, Thomas Straubhaar, Florin Vadean et. al, “What are the migrants’ contributions to employment and Growth? A European approach,”
claimed that they fit well into the economy by working in sectors undesired by Britons:

I do not think that we disturb the Brits. We are doing work that any Englishman would not be very happy to do (happy - m. B., MM) to to. I do believe that because I do not see Britons in such places (AEIM №983-III: 49).

The combination of labour restrictions and desire to immigrate to the UK was the reason for the Bulgarians to do jobs that they never did before. Therefore, the stories about the first encounters of immigrants with this kind of work were comical:

The first time in my life I held a drill and other construction tools (AEIM №983-III: 87);
I started painting. They hired us from several sites. The first time we started upwards and at lunch the man said, “Thanks a lot. You are done here” After two or three days, I went to the National Gallery, but I gave up work there. I started to learn slowly and I worked as a painter for a year and half (AEIM №983-III: 58).

The situation with migrant agricultural workers was similar:

We worked on a farm. There were different kinds of vegetables. It was quite difficult. That was my first encounter with fields. Beans, zucchini, potatoes. There were Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Poles, and Romanians. We were on this farm for three months and then went to another apple farm for two months (AEIM №983-III: 58).

Some narratives told of immigrants who engaged in activities that were considered dangerous for their health and they did not know how to do. One interlocutor began to work illegally and without documents with a big construction crane:

I worked anonymously and I thought that if I fall or something happens to me nobody knows who I am… I thought they would throw me in the trash and nobody will find me. Nobody knows who I am. I do not exist in any system. No documents, no money… (AEIM №983-III: 92).

The low-skilld jobs influenced the migrants’ self perception. The lower social status, compared to the one they had in their homeland, is viewed highly emotionally and traumatically by the Bulgarians:

I cleaned hotel rooms and I cried everyday because I got off the stage (the interlocutor was a singer before emigration to the UK), because after parting with him (British husband - b.m. M. M.) and leave, I did not get a single penny … I walked every day and cried: “Where I come from and where I am now! (AEIM №983-III: 16-17).

The new lower social position is reinforced by the insulting attitude towards newcomers in the early periods of their settlement, “They watch us as we are slouch or wretch” (AEIM №983-III: 5). Most of the immigrants were comforting themselves with the thought that “there is no shameful work”. Therefore, they often refused to define their employment with the phrase that they have “a business”. For many of them the work, regardless what it is, is a way to achieve their goals, “because I was a queen in Bulgaria, but nobody is guilty I came here!” (AEIM №970-III: 30).

British official policy and negative stereotypes articulated by tabloids also affect the migrants’
perception of the new country. They felt detachment from other East Europeans, as citizens from different and lower level, and “less European”. All this creates an uncomfortable environment in which immigrants live. Many had a feeling that they were not well received by the local community and therefore they often reported incidents of discrimination. Bulgarians were not familiar with the UK historical accumulations, so they did not understand the British attitude towards the immigrants from the Commonwealth countries who have more rights and privileges than Eastern Europeans:

It is not right to discriminate us. Can someone from Africa come to enroll and take benefits?! But they raise hands of us(?) – Bulgaria and Romania. There are 15 million Indians and 1 million Pakistanis... Is not discrimination?! It sucks what they do for us. Otherwise… the English are quite tolerant but they do not put everyone on an equal footing (AEIM №983-III: 51).

The immigrants shared different explanations for the negative attitude towards them. Some Bulgarians looked for some accumulated Cold War stereotypes and insufficient knowledge of Bulgarians and their culture. Another reported reason was the large migration wave of Poles and other Eastern Europeans after 2004. Most immigrants spoke about the Polish ‘flow’ that had gripped Britain since 2004 and which shaped the negative expectations regarding the Bulgarians:

[…] Two million [Poles] came here. The Britons went crazy, the wave washed them away, those who have lived all their life here. If you want to work you should work under minimum wage. The Poles never earn such money and the Englishmen hate them. All the negatives pertain to the Poles. Many of them are hated... When they heard that we will go, they just trembled: ‘O, how many Poles came! Now Bulgarians and Romanians will come here!’ (AEIM №983-III: 92).

According to the opinions of interlocutors the people from Eastern Europe were artificially divided by the British government. The UK immigration policy separated people who have similar origin (Slavic ethnic roots; common Communist past; similar social and professional experience) and gave them or deprived them of available employment opportunities.

In interviews conducted between 2010 and 2013, they were adamant that after removal of labour restrictions in 2014 a large influx of Bulgarians should not be expected because:

... Those who wanted to come had already managed to cheat the system. They [Britons] are waiting for the big rush but Bulgarians are already here. Whoever wanted to escape – had already escaped (AEIM №983-III: 92).

Negative public attitude towards immigrants from Bulgaria, as represented by British media and political discourse, gave rise to incomprehension and resentment among Bulgarians:

Although we have long been accepted in the EU, they still hold this negative attitude and don’t allow us to work. And at the same time, we see how many people from the Arab world invaded unobstructedly and they study, live and run their businesses here. The Britons are afraid of them, just spy them... and there has been such an attitude towards us ... I don’t hear about a Bulgarian involved in murders or fights. More Poles do it but they have the right to come and work. I have not
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seen drunken Bulgarians falling on the street. So, I cannot explain why there is such an attitude towards Bulgarians (AEIM №983-III: 24).

According to the immigrants, the media images, together with the real migration situation and image of Bulgarians, prevent them from finding better jobs and integrating in the UK. However, they recognize that anthropological reasons very often make them difficult to distinguish from other Eastern Europeans, which in its turn helps them to find a place in the new society.

The strong negativity towards the further opening of the labour market for Bulgarians and Romanians by January 2014 and the unclear policy of the British government were the reasons for organized protests by Romanians and Bulgarians in late 2013 and early 2014 in London and other major cities. This was their attempt to attract the attention of the British government towards their problems. For that purpose, the ‘Alliance Against Romanian and Bulgarian Discrimination’ was created. The protests grew due to the discontent over discrimination of all immigrants, regardless of their ethnic origin. Strong anti-immigrant sentiments in Britain were the reason why in August 2015 the Polish community organized a strike against “the lack of respect” for their contribution to the economy and against poor working conditions.

At the same time, Bulgarians were unhappy that their own country did not oppose public discrimination:

Why did the ambassador not come out and say something about the restrictions? Here all Bulgarians work hard but enjoy fewer social benefits. Such a system’ (AEIM №979-III: 24);

And the worst is that no one from the Bulgarian side came and defended us, ... We’re pretty well integrated here’ (AEIM №983-III: 50).

Thus immigrants felt rejected by the host and home country. Although public awareness of Bulgarian and Romanian immigrants dropped in the summer of 2015 and attention shifted to the refugees trying to cross the Channel, Nigel Farage mentioned Bulgaria and Romania as the main culprits for the increase migration to the UK last year. He also spoke about the discrimination of immigrants from non-European countries at the expense of those from Europe.

49 Alliance Against Romanian and Bulgarian Discrimination, http://www.aarbd.org/
Some conclusions

Having examined the British policy towards the Bulgarians and the results based on statistics and interviews, the following conclusions can be outlined. Regardless of the political and media campaigns, the number of Bulgarians in the UK has slowly and gradually increased and they have become more visible in British society. Although the immigration to the UK was relatively low for a number of years compared to the Bulgarian movements towards other countries such as Germany, Greece or Spain which intensified immediately after the collapse of the communist regime, the “British dream” (Goodhart 2013) has managed to create a large community in the UK. Notwithstanding the labour restrictions, the number of Bulgarians increased especially after the country’s accession to the European Union on January 1, 2007. The immigrants found different ways to settle in the UK, using all possible official opportunities, often consecutively or combining them.

The British immigration policy, which sought to fill in gaps in the labour market due to the lack of interest of locals to take such positions, failed because a large number of immigrants did not possess the required qualifications. This problem raises the question about the appropriateness and effectiveness of the British migration policy. On the one hand, a similar state policy leads to a decrease in the abilities and knowledge of immigrants as a result of the more unskilled work they are supposed to do. In this relation scholars are even talking about “brain loss”, in the cases of higher qualified immigrants. On the other hand, due to the official requirements the people who are hired are not qualified, which makes the situation difficult for the employers and even dangerous for peoples’ life and health. All this reflects on the migrants’ feelings concerning the host country. The negative attitude is reinforced by the media information that contributed to the establishment of stereotypes forcing many Bulgarians to feel uncomfortable upon their arrival in the new community. Perhaps most migrants would more easily accept the hard and unacceptable labor rather than the discrimination and crimes which occurred after the Brexit referendum in June 2016. Everything mentioned so far raises questions about the migrants’ future adaptation and loyalty towards the host country.

About the Author

Mila Maeva graduated in Ethnology from Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” in 2002 and in 2005 she obtained a PhD in Ethnography from Ethnographic Institute and Museum of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Her first book Turks from Bulgaria, emigrants in Turkey (Culture and Identity)” was published in 2006. She was a visiting scholar at the University of Warwick (2007), the University of Manchester (2010-2011), United Kingdom, and the University of Pittsburgh, USA (2009). She is author of numerous articles on the culture and identity of the Muslim (especially Turkish) population in Bulgaria, Turkey and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Now her research interests are focused on Bulgarian migration waves to the Great Britain, France and Norway.

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‘We are not Tolerant as a Nation, but we want Others to Tolerate us’: Romanian Experiences of Discrimination and their Attitudes Towards British People

by Alexandra Bulat

Abstract
This article discusses findings from a qualitative study conducted for my MPhil dissertation. It draws on the views and experiences of Romanian citizens living in the UK, collected before the June 23rd UK referendum on ending EU membership. It addresses two aspects from my thesis, which are highly relevant to the topical Brexit debates: on the one hand, what kinds of discriminatory experiences Romanians faced in the receiving society, and, on the other hand, how Romanian migrants perceived the British. For the purpose of this short paper, the empirical data is illustrated in the form of two case studies, the stories of Avram and Medeea, which include dominant themes on both aspects. Overall, the paper presents an apparent contradictory discourse and reflects on its potential explanations. While condemning negative attitudes towards them in the UK, Romanians showed their own negative attitudes towards the British (and ‘others’ in general). They frequently embraced the very stereotypes about fellow Romanian migrants, which they vocally condemned in other instances. A class dimension to stereotypes emerges throughout the discussion. The paper is open-ended and the conclusion reflects on how the UK’s decision to leave the EU can add complexity to the presented findings.

Key words: Brexit, Romanian migration, discrimination, British attitudes, migrant attitudes, migrant stereotypes, contact theory, perceptions of class, integration.

Context and previous research

Romania’s accession to the European Union in 2007 and the more recent removal of work restrictions for its citizens in 2014 provoked intense media and political debates in the UK. There have been concerns that large numbers of Romanians will come to take advantage of the British job market and welfare state. While their motivations to choose UK as their migration destination are complex, and not limited to work and welfare, the increasing number of Romanian migrants in the UK is clearly illustrated in statistical data. According to 2016 reports from the Office for National Statistics, Romania topped the list of the five most common countries from which people immigrated in 2015.¹ Like in the case of Polish migration to the UK after the 2004 Accession, EU2 (Romanian and Bulgarian) migration is, according to the latest figures, the only type of EU population intake to show increasing NINo registrations. A2 migration flows take place in the context of record-high overall net migration figures, thus resisting the Home Office’s efforts in reducing the number of migrants from inside the EU.

How are those recent migrants received in the UK? Academic literature has emphasised the ways is which Romanians have been victims of unfair (tabloid) media, which have racialised and demonised the migrants in question and portrayed them as undesirable, poor, criminal, culturally different and generally having a negative influence on the receiving country.²

² Light and Young, “European Union enlargement.”
³ Fox et al, “The racialisation.”
Previous studies have also addressed the everyday discrimination Romanians face in the UK. As this paper later illustrates, adding to findings from published research, these negative experiences continue to exist. This is despite the fact Romanians have had, since 2014, full (civil and working) rights in the UK, just like any other EU migrants. Arguably, with the Brexit vote, the situation of EU migrants generally, not only Romanians, has been increasingly insecure. Moreover, reported discrimination has risen.

The discrimination faced by migrants is correlated to the nature of attitudes towards migrants in the country. British attitudes towards migrants have been discussed in the previous months, especially in the context of the EU referendum.\(^4\) The UK is a peculiar case amongst Western European countries because of the concerning level of hostile attitudes towards migration. Negative - or at least sceptical - attitudes were present and recorded long before the referendum. Despite the UK being known internationally for its active promotion of tolerance and diversity, local attitudes towards migration do not construct such a progressive picture. For example, the 2014 Eurobarometer results show that, while 18% of all Europeans considered immigration an important national issue, 38% of the British did so.\(^5\) Even before Brexit campaigners outlined their arguments for reducing migration, there was already a large majority (77%) of respondents in the British Social Attitudes survey who wanted migration reduced either by a ‘little’ or ‘a lot’. The majority of those selected the latter option.\(^6\) According to YouGov\(^7\), greater control of EU migration and limiting benefits for EU migrants were the most popular requests during David Cameron’s negotiations prior to the referendum. Additionally, the UK has witnessed increased support for the UK Independence Party\(^8\), which arguably shifted the entire debate on EU migration to the right. This put pressures on traditionally pro-immigration British parties, such as Labour, who limited their open support for further migration in the referendum context.\(^9\) Thus hostility towards EU migration was not created by the referendum campaign itself, as some may claim. Negative attitudes towards EU migrants, which existed long before the referendum, were only legitimised, strengthened and popularised through the Brexit campaigns and later, by the vote to leave the EU.

However, British attitudes towards EU migrants do not exist in a vacuum. It is important to equally assess the ‘other side’ of attitudes towards migration, which is EU migrants’ own views on different types of migrants in the UK, as well as their openness towards locals. Until recently, there was very little focus on these aspects, and further analysis is required. Paskeviciute and Anderson are amongst the first scholars to claim that migrants’ views on migration (including the migration of their co-nationals or co-ethnics), despite having both theoretical and empirical relevance, have been largely ignored, because researchers have chosen to focus on native populations.\(^10\) In the UK

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\(^4\) Although, to my knowledge, there are no major attitudes surveys differentiating migrants by nationality, there are qualitative studies exploring British attitudes towards migration, in which some participants talk about Romanians (e.g. Leddy-Owen, “Liberal Nationalism”)


\(^6\) Ford and Heath, “Immigration: a nation divided?,” 79.

\(^7\) YouGov, “YouGov Survey Results.”

\(^8\) UKIP gained 3,881,099 votes in the last General Election (BBC, “Election 2015”), representing a significant increase compared to 919,546 in 2010 (BBC, “Election 2010”).

\(^9\) See Ford and Goodwin, “Revolt on the Right”, for a comprehensive discussion on the rise of UKIP and its impact on British politics of migration.

\(^10\) Paskeviciute and Anderson, “Dual allegiance.”
context, a number of researchers, whom I refer to throughout this paper, recently explored some of the relations between EU migrants and the local population or other groups in the UK. There is a small body of literature on EU migrants’ attitudes towards the British. One important finding is that EU migrant interviewees tend to imagine the British as only white. This is reflected in my own fieldwork with Romanians. Second (or third) generation migrants living in the UK were not seen as part of the local British population: Black British, or Indian British, for example, were simply described as Black or Indian ‘migrants’ by the majority of my participants. A few even emphasised that there was an obvious difference between ‘white’, ‘true British’ and the ‘others’ who were ‘impostors’ in their view. More research is thus needed to analyse the different attitudes towards ‘types’ of British people.

Although there are clearly recent efforts to cover issues of EU migrants-British relations, there is no comprehensive study on Romanians’ attitudes in this sense. This is despite the popularity of Romanians in media and political discourse, who were often singled out as examples by politicians such as UKIP’s Nigel Farage in support of pro-Brexit arguments. Moreover, as previously mentioned, the increasing number of Romanians in the UK is another argument for selecting Romanian migration as a research focus. To emphasise this, Kaczmarczyk noted that ‘in the context of Central and Eastern Europe, the scale of migration from Poland is comparable only with the migration propensity of Romanians’.

Two main research problems have been defined in the context discussed so far. First, there is a need to know in what ways Romanians interact with the local British-born population, and the inverse. Second, analysing what attitudes Romanian migrants have towards their co-nationals living in the UK, as well as other migrants, is essential in uncovering the other side of attitudes towards migration. Previous research offers some useful insights into unpacking those problems, especially the first one. The vast majority of papers on Romanians carry a common message: Romanians have often been the victims of unfair and sometimes xenophobic discourses, which affected their everyday lives in various ways. One of the more comprehensive studies on Romanians in the UK is Briggs and Dobre’s ethnography. In 2014 they wrote about Romanians’ experiences prior to the expiration of work restrictions, analysing forty with Romanians in lower-paid work. The ethnography only briefly mentioned how participants interacted with other cultures and nationalities, focussing instead on the hardship Romanians faced in London. For example, it addressed difficulties regarding documentation, illegal work and instances when Romanians were discriminated against. The authors underlined Romanians’ inferior position as victims in an unfair society, situated ‘below most, if not all’ in a social hierarchy. In this ethnography and other articles, such as Fox et al’s, the Romanians’ situation illustrates the ‘new racism’ or colour-blind racism. This concept is not so ‘new’ in fact - it has been theorised in the 1980s by researchers of ‘white migration’ to the United States. According to this theory, the ‘unnoticed white migrants’ become white

13 Briggs and Dobre, “Culture and immigration in context,” 27.
14 Fox et al, “The racialisation”.
15 Barker, “The new racism”.
16 Bonilla-Silva, “Racism without racists”.
racialised identities\textsuperscript{18} in an era of ‘colour blindness’.\textsuperscript{19} This process of xeno-racialization, or, to put it more visually, of the poor ‘becoming the new black’\textsuperscript{20} has been the dominant framework used to explain Central and Eastern European migrants’ discrimination in Western states.\textsuperscript{21} The new (Eastern European) migrants become ‘coloured white’\textsuperscript{22} in host societies: they are ‘invisible’ due to their skin colour, but become ‘visible’ through their migrant status, language, culture, economic and other characteristics. Similar to other groups in the history of migration, Romanians become ‘suitable enemies’ in the UK at particular moments in time, such as immediately prior to and after being granted full rights to work, and, more recently, in the context of the EU referendum. Although it is paramount to research the discrimination and dilemmas migrants face, there is always the risk of romanticising migrant narratives, as Romocea\textsuperscript{23} and others pointed out. The stories many migrants tell the interviewer are touching and will have a priming effect when researchers decide ‘whose side are we on’?\textsuperscript{24} Nevertheless, previous literature does not only portray Romanians as a harmless migrant group, as people relocating to work hard while being accepting of everyone. For instance, there is a significant number of studies focusing on Romanians’ negative attitudes towards the Roma. Discrimination against the Roma is a well-researched issue in Eastern Europe; negative discourses towards them extend from individual conversations to institutions and even the media. Briggs and Dobre stated that their Romanian participants were distancing themselves from the Roma.\textsuperscript{25} Similarly, Fox et al emphasised how Romanian migrants often deny discrimination by differentiating between themselves from the Roma.\textsuperscript{26} An image of ‘us’ Romanians and ‘them’ Roma is therefore constructed inside the ‘Romanian-born migrant group’.\textsuperscript{27} Discourse analysis by Tileagă even went as far as to suggest that Romanians’ talk about the Roma ‘is more extreme than the anti-alien, anti-immigrant prejudice talk studied by numerous western critical researchers’.\textsuperscript{28}

With the Roma exception, little is known about how Romanians perceive other groups, how they see natives, and how they regard their ‘own group’, however they may define it. In this context, researchers have advocated fresh research on the ‘human face’ of recent migration, carried out by students and academics, who are usually migrants themselves.\textsuperscript{29} More specifically, Moroșanu, one of the first UK based researchers studying Romanian migration, emphasised the lack of studies on migrants’ attitudes towards other populations.\textsuperscript{30} Briggs and Dobre also identified the potential for more research on how Romanians interact with other migrant groups and with British nationals.\textsuperscript{31} Researchers have thus acknowledged these areas of further inquiry in the growing literature on newer EU migrants, which need to be addressed.

\textsuperscript{18} Garner, “Empirical research”.
\textsuperscript{19} Lewis, “What group?”.
\textsuperscript{20} Sivanandan, “Poverty is the new Black”.
\textsuperscript{21} For example, Dawney, “Racialisation”.
\textsuperscript{22} Roediger and Barrett, “In-between peoples”.
\textsuperscript{23} Romocea, “Ethics and emotions”.
\textsuperscript{24} Becker, “Whose side are we on?”.
\textsuperscript{25} Briggs and Dobre, “Culture and immigration in context,” 60.
\textsuperscript{26} Fox et al, “Denying Discrimination,” 743.
\textsuperscript{27} A part of Roma in the UK have Romanian passports or IDs and are counted as Romanians in UK statistics.
\textsuperscript{28} Tileagă, “Accounting for extreme prejudice,” 603.
\textsuperscript{29} Favell, “The new face,” 702.
\textsuperscript{30} Moroșanu, “Researching co-ethnic migrants,” par. 28.
\textsuperscript{31} Briggs and Dobre, “Culture and immigration in context,” 9.
Brief notes on methodology

The overall findings presented in this paper are based on the views and attitudes of forty-five Romanian-born citizens living in the UK. The were carried out between December 2015 and April 2016, before the EU referendum, but during heated debates on EU membership. Many of the conversations carried on after recording stopped and field notes were taken to complement the recorded material. The findings were further informed by attending Romanian events in London, taking field notes while observing Romanians interact on public transportation or at train stations, personal experiences with Romanians and reading countless posts from Romanian Facebook groups corresponding to the locations where took place (e.g. Români în Londra26). Romanians were interviewed in different neighbourhoods in order to capture the variety of experiences they faced.33 Different ethnic compositions of an area compared to another (e.g. London and Cambridge) encourage reflection on how location might affect Romanians’ experiences of discrimination and their attitudes towards the British. Romanians were recruited through a range of methods so that the probability of targeting a specific group was minimised. Participants were found first through snowball strategies, then through Facebook groups such as Românii în Londra and Românii în Cambridge and also through Gumtree advertisement. The sample of forty-five individuals is diverse. There is almost a gender balance - twenty-four women and twenty-one men. Nine were students in the UK, twelve did not have a degree level qualification and twenty-four were educated to a degree-level or higher. From those with a degree, only seven had a job described to be ‘reflecting their qualifications’. This shows the well-researched phenomenon of migrant downskilling (as well as skill mismatch in the job market), explored in depth in previous research. Some Romanians came to the UK as their second or third country of migration. They have been living in the UK for periods ranging from three months to twenty-six years. The age range is eighteen to fifty-four and the mean is twenty-nine (with one participant not disclosing his age). Most participants were Romanian citizens only, but I also interviewed two Romanian Hungarians, one Romanian Moldovan and two British Romanians. The interviews, conducted in Romanian, were transcribed directly into English by the author. The initial coding consisted in thinking about the data, following Robson’s question of ‘what is this piece of data an example of?’34 The data were then explored further through focused coding, following Charmaz’s constructivist model of grounded theory,35 by selecting relevant ‘initial codes and test them against extensive data’.36 In total, the compiled data I focused on comprised 255 12-sized typed pages.

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32 When last checked in December 2016, this group had 129,527 active members - mainly Romanians already living in London and some Romanians who plan to come to London. The author reads daily posts on this group, which range from solidarity actions, such as helping fellow Romanians in London and elsewhere in the UK, to rather unpleasant posts about Romanians or other national and ethnic groups.

33 36 interviews were carried out only for the MPhil thesis, with an additional 20 conducted by the researcher for the YMOBILITY (www.ymobility.eu) project. Some participants were interviewed for both purposes. The overall number of participants is 45. The author wishes acknowledge the YMOBILITY team who offered her training and Dr. Thomas Jeffrey Miley, who supervised the dissertation on which this article is based. - Participants were interviewed in five locations: Cambridge, Chester, Birmingham, Brighton and Greater London (zones 1-6). All participant names are pseudonyms.
of relevant fragments on either experiences of discrimination, or attitudes towards natives, minorities and co-nationals. Because all data are subject to the researcher’s interpretation, interview fragments are presented in the context they occurred, so the reader can judge the reliability of the analysis. The case study presentation helps in this sense, because it links the attitudes to participants’ contexts and migration stories, compared to the technique of presenting a decontextualised mix of selective quotations from all forty-five interviewees. Lastly, the researcher’s positionality, as a Romanian-born citizen living in the UK, needs to be taken into account when reflecting on the interpretation of findings.

37 Rapley, “The art(fulness),” 319.
38 Due to space limitations, please refer to my dissertation, which discusses methodology in more detail, including positionality.

Discussing findings through case studies

Having the context, relevant literature and methodology in mind, the article proceeds by comparing and contrasting the cases of two Romanian participants. The two participants’ accounts illustrate how attitudes towards British locals and Romanian migrants are constructed through the interviews, emphasising the class dimension that many of them had. Avram and Medeea, a man and a woman both in their thirties, came from different backgrounds, worked in different job sectors and do not have the same level of education. Although social attitudes tend to differ according to these variables, their perspectives about British people and fellow Romanians, were largely similar. Although often worded differently, their views were rather typical of the overall attitudes expressed in the sample. Both had ‘in-between’ attitudes about the British and the way they were perceived in the UK. Both praised their own work ethic and criticised some co-nationals in the UK, especially the less integrated, ‘lower class’ ones. However, Avram showed extreme views about racial and religious others, even describing himself as a ‘racist and Islamophobe’. He deliberately avoided contact with some groups he ‘did not like’. In contrast, Medeea thought of herself as fully integrated into the British culture. She clearly expressed her attachment to diversity, having friends of mixed races and ethnicities and also a British partner. Before analysing their stories, it is essential to present the main findings from all the interviews, so the reader can understand how these are represented through the two individual cases.

To start with, it is important to acknowledge that about half of my interviewees openly stated that they experienced discrimination in
various forms. Some others had friends or relatives feeling discriminated against, or heard from third parties about cases of Romanians treated unfairly. Some participants denied discrimination and a few were situated on the opposite end of the spectrum, feeling welcomed in the UK. When aware, participants were usually critical of media portrayals of Romanians. Most who confessed feeling discriminated against noted negative reactions from people when disclosing their Romanian nationality. About half noted how others mistook them (Romanians) for Roma. They were usually upset by this association, even when this was done jokingly by natives or others. These reactions were not limited to associations with the Roma. A related emerging theme was that Romanians felt other (EU) migrants were more welcomed in the UK than they were. The other common type of discrimination stories happened in the workplace. The phenomenon of deskilling can be regarded as a form of indirect discrimination. Deskilling is interlinked with the precarious work many Eastern Europeans do especially in the service sector. Although most were happy with their work, some participants believed that Romanians do not have equal opportunities in the job recruitment process. The most disheartening experiences were of participants who were significantly underpaid, with one man being paid as little as £3 an hour in a car wash, when the minimum wage was £6.70 for someone of his age at that time. Another type of experience was direct discrimination during the job, encountered in the form of discriminatory comments or actions taken by clients or staff in the workplace. Moreover, one participant was a victim of physical abuse on a street during daylight, which he thought happened because he was Romanian. But how did Romanians react to such experiences? First, it has been commonly acknowledged that migrants show low levels of reporting racist or discriminatory incidents because they do not know how and whom to report it to, and often lack the linguistic competence to do so. It seems this applies to some interviewees. Second, although not making formal complaints, other participants mentioned how they sought to challenge and change British people’s negative opinions, by showing them the ‘positive side’ of Romanian culture.

Nevertheless, despite this rather discouraging picture, some participants did not feel disadvantaged. Some linked not feeling discriminated with their good work ethic. Very few did not identify as Romanian, but instead chose to define themselves as Europeans, world citizens or other, stressing that they could not be discriminated based on their nationality. Additionally, some explained discrimination happened because one was ‘a foreigner’, but not due to being of a particular ethnicity or nationality. In addition, participants who migrated to another country before arriving in the UK tended to feel more accepted. This calls for a comparative perspective in future research, questioning whether Britain is more welcoming to Romanians than other European countries, particularly post-Brexit. Throughout the case studies, some of these main points are contextualised and exemplified by interview data.

However, discrimination or the lack of such experiences constitutes only one frame the study of Romanian migrants can take. Despite generally criticising some British people for being intolerant and discriminatory towards them, Romanians also engaged in stereotyping the British. Nevertheless, about half of my participants did not have meaningful conver-
sations with British people. Thus the stereotypes were not based on personal experience, but rather on ‘imagining the British’. Their reasons for not interacting more with locals were mainly the lack of English language abilities or simply that it was more difficult to become friends with them, compared to other people who were considered more culturally proximate (such as Italians or Spanish migrants). The participants who felt ‘close’ to British people were women who had a British partner or Romanians who interacted daily with British people at their workplace as part of teams or at university. Interviewees showed mixed opinions regarding the British, but there were some themes stressed by most participants. One common depiction was that British people are ‘lazy’. The overwhelming majority of participants believed in this stereotype. Romanians perceived the British to be less efficient at work compared to them. Especially men who worked in construction or related industries stressed this. Additionally, many participants described natives as ‘hypocrites’ or ‘fake’. Some participants observed xenophobic and racist views amongst the British and questioned them in relation to Britain’s colonial past. They believed British people should not complain about migrants coming to the UK, when they were first to ‘invade countries’. A related theme was that natives were hypocrites for not recognising migrants’ positive contributions to the UK. Finally, there was a recurring theme of ‘benefit scrounger Britons’. Some participants mentioned that natives are the ones draining the system, while they blame the migrants for this. Less frequent negative depictions related to alcohol usage. Critiques were directed towards the relationship between British parents and their children, who were not seen as sharing Romanians’ family culture. Nevertheless, compared to racial, ethnic or religious minorities (such as Indians and Muslims, described in my thesis), natives received a wide range of positive characterisations, such as being ‘open-minded’ (contradicting, in many cases, previous statements about them as xenophobic) and ‘helpful’. The ‘civic spirit’ and ‘respecting the rule of law’ were also amongst the top positives about Britons, which were understandable, considering that many participants disclosed that they left Romania because of the ‘corrupt system’.

Lastly, perhaps the most surprising finding was a dominant narrative of wanting to avoid Romanians altogether, or certain ‘types’ of co-nationals. This was because many felt disappointed with how Romanians tried to ‘trick’ them when migrating to the UK. Although I observed solidarity in online communities (e.g. crowdfunding help with the repatriation of bodies, financially support for Romanians who lost their job et cetera), many participants did not have a pleasant experience with co-nationals. Moreover, a few participants avoided Romanians particularly because they disagreed with co-nationals’ negative views on racial, sexual or other minorities. However, although I observed many instances when Romanians expressed racist views in everyday life (for example, while on the London underground), those situations should be seen reflexively. Perhaps Romanians felt they could express socially unacceptable views more freely in public when talking in Romanian, compared to the majority population that could not do this without being understood by almost everyone else.

But how were some of these experiences described in participants’ own words? And how did they fit into their migration stories?
A. Avram

There is discrimination but, unfortunately, I have to say this to you, it is rather justified.

Here the Briton finishes college, lives in his mum’s basement, plays on X-box and asks for benefits.

The first case study is Avram, a man in his mid-thirties, married to a Romanian. When I met him, he had already been living three years in the UK and working in IT. In Romania, he chose not to pursue a university degree. Instead, he started to work straight after college, doing a variety of jobs, although a career in IT was his aim. He left Romania with his partner mainly for better work opportunities, thus for economic reasons, as he described them. He was ‘fed up’ with Romania because ‘you had to know someone’ in order to gain good employment (i.e. getting a job through connections, rather than a meritocratic system), a view which was shared widely amongst my participants. He left Romania with his partner mainly for better work opportunities, thus for economic reasons, as he described them.

Not the humblest participant by far, he told me unprompted: ‘I work on average 15 minutes a day and […] at the end of the month I have £3,000 left’. Avram saw the UK and Norway as the only countries offering such earning prospects in his field. Although he did not experience hate crimes, discrimination incidents were not unfamiliar to him. At work and beyond, Avram was subject to many jokes and attitudes, based on the fact he was born in Romania. As with the majority of participants, associations with the Roma made Avram feel insulted. For example, one such incident he recalled was: ‘[Colleagues tell] bad jokes, in general […] of course, they begin with “talk to the gypsy if you need any-

thing” or things like that.’ He then underlined how the Romanian nationality was always mentioned when talking about them in the press, although emphasising the nationality did not apply to other migrant groups: ‘When it is about Romanians, it is not about a ‘European citizen’ so to speak, like they say about Asians. No, it is a Romanian’. Avram described how the role of Romanians as scapegoats in the UK is only temporary, part of a cycle of migrant stereotyping. He thus was confident that, with years passing by, Romanians’ situation in the UK would significantly improve. Most participants perceived this issue in similar terms:

[The UK] ‘it’s like the church, where the devil is guilty of everything. […] Eastern Europeans who come and steal and so on. Five, ten years ago, there were the Poles, the Poles who came over and so on. Now, it’s Romanians and Bulgarians. In five years’ time, let’s say, if Turkey joins the EU, there will be the Turks who do this and that. Thirty years ago, it was the Pakistanis. The devil will always exist, it is the local Satan, and the one we blame for whatever is going wrong. We [Romanians] have this role for the moment.’

When prompted about the negative experiences with British people at work, Avram stated there were mixed reactions. His accounts are illustrative of another theme in the data, which is the role of contacts in shaping attitudes: [There are] ‘the ones who look at us and say, ‘this guy is appreciated by everyone in the company, he’s nice, he solves all problems, Romanians are hardworking’. And then there are the others who

39 My interpretations are informed by the contact theory described in Pettigrew, “Intergroup contact theory”.

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interact less with Romanians generally and then they tend to swallow everything the UKIP or Conservative party idiots say and so on. And then of course they see us in a very bad light […]

Although he experienced some discrimination, Avram avoided to label it as such for his individual case. In his view, discrimination was rather an issue for others, but not for himself.

Discrimination exists, it exists. I have not been very affected by it. Without bragging too much, let’s say I am the best in my department. There are 30 people there. So I have not been really affected because, in my case, the professional side compensates for all my weaker points.

In this segment, Avram used one strategy of ‘denying discrimination’, described by Fox et al. in a paper on Romanians. Some of their participants, similar to the ones in my research, linked not feeling discriminated to their good work ethic. Nevertheless, although Avram denied discrimination at work, he still observed a typical case of discrimination in his company. He pointed out later in the interview how his British co-workers were promoted sooner than he was, despite claiming he worked harder than they did: ‘When I was about to get promoted from level 2 to level 3, I got it later. Before that, some others were promoted who, honestly, they do not deserve being there, like really, […] they were almost completely incompetent, but…they were not Romanians.’

But how did Avram react to these experiences? He stated discrimination was justified in certain circumstances. More precisely, discrimination was justified when the migrants refused to comply with the receiving society’s cultural norms. This attitude was supported by a number of other participants. For example, when asked to explain why he thought Britons had priority in the job market, Avram commented:

[…] they prefer to choose someone that they know, okay, this person will be politically correct, he will not say bad things that can bring ten lawsuits on us. There is discrimination, but, unfortunately, I have to say this to you, it is quite justified. They [company] will not tell you, of course, ‘I chose him instead because you are Romanian’…they will not tell you something like that.

Avram saw Romanians as culturally different from the British. He discussed at length the lack of political correctness in fellow Romanians’ speech, which affected their image at work and their prospects of employment. Learning to be politically correct meant being integrated in the British culture, something which Avram thought very few Romanian migrants achieved. Generally, participants saw Romanians as lacking integration. Particularly those from poorer backgrounds were described as segregated from British people. Discrimination thus, in their view, was understandable when migrants did not make ‘efforts to integrate’. They argued against the idea that both the receiving society and migrants are active players in the process of integration, a perspective that is commonly supported by integration theorists and academics. My participants tended to adopt an individualist approach, the view that migrants are the only ones responsible for their integration. In this sense, the dominant narrative was that most British people appreciated and respected Romanians from a professional point of view, but not from a cultural one. The following quote from Avram, who was asked about how he felt at work, summarises this perspective:

40 Fox et al, “Denying discrimination”.

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From a professional viewpoint, my colleagues see Romanians as Superman’s descendants - the most incredibly hard-working, most efficient and so on. After employing me, after seeing how I work compared to the rest of my colleagues, they sought to specifically recruit Romanians. [...] Personally, I do not think they appreciate us on a cultural level. We’re seen as uncivilised, we did not grow up with this political correctness thing in Romania, blah blah. 99% of our jokes insult or offend someone over here and so on. In Romania, I am sure you heard jokes about disabled people, gypsies, blondes, and so on, they are normal there. Here, it’s like, [you] don’t even realise you offended someone.

Romanians’ lack of integration, as a personal responsibility, was further illustrated by Avram. He referred to co-nationals’ limited English knowledge and the fact they had almost entirely Romanian groups of friends. Romanians’ personal choice to make co-national friends was seen as a barrier to integration:

[Some Romanians] they do not even speak English [...] they try to learn 2-3 words to buy cigarettes or order a coffee, but they do not really bother, because they usually live inside their Romanian circles. On average, I would say 90% of Romanians’ acquaintances in England are also Romanians.

These views complemented other negative opinions of Romanians that Avram expressed, particularly Romanians’ criminal behaviour. In the first minutes of our conversation, when describing his journey to the UK, he stated: ‘If I liked Romanians, I would have stayed in Romania’. However, most of Avram’s close friends in the UK were Romanian-born, including his wife. He was also more engaged in transnational activities than our second case study, Medeea. He kept in touch with Romanians back home and did not plan to stay in the UK permanently. Moreover, Avram was one of the few who believed there are fewer Romanians in the UK than official statistics showed. This strongly contrasts with the large majority of my participants who thought there are ‘millions’ of Romanians, agreeing with some tabloids’ headlines, for instance. However, his views about co-nationals were overwhelmingly negative. Avram heard from local media about crimes committed by Romanians in London: ‘I cannot say I was surprised even by a little’, he added. When discussing the types of Romanians who live in London, he started to describe them as following:

Some of them are begging, if you walk through London you will generally see them in the Marble Arch area, you also find them next to tube or bus stops. Some do not beg, they do all sorts of tricks. Some come, husband and wife, the husband does the tricks or small bad things, like shell games and things like that, the wives are begging or do all sorts of jobs like, today I wash dishes, tomorrow I am cleaning after clients leave, things like that. Nevertheless, Avram showed appreciation and support towards ‘hard-working Romanians like him’, who ‘adapt’ to life in the UK. Despite not having tertiary education, he used his highly-paid job as a differentiator between him and the ‘lower class’ of Romanians who ‘refused’ to integrate. In a similar way, Avram’s attitudes towards the British depended on the ‘type’ of British person. Like with Romanians, this seemed to be a classed differentiation. For example, it was evident from the following description of British people he disliked: ‘Here the Brit finishes college, lives in his mum’s basement, plays on X-box and asks for benefits’. The lower education (not
going to university), lack of personal housing due to limited resources (living with parents), combined with claiming benefits and sedentary hobbies such as playing video games, are all signifiers, amongst others, constructing the ‘lazy British’ and ‘benefit scrounger’ stereotypes. These were described by a majority of my participants. Finally, yet importantly, when asked about ‘ethnic minority British people’, Avram was quick to correct me. Like many other Romanians in my sample, he identified Brits as whites only. Non-white Brits were certainly migrants. Britishness was thus about ethnicity, not necessarily place of birth, possession of citizenship or time spent living in a country: ‘It’s the same for me if your grandma came here 60 years ago, from my point of view you are Indian. They call themselves British, but they are as British as I will be in one or two years’ time.’

**B. Medeea**

*I did not ever have problems with other nations in the same way I had with Romanians.*

The Brit does not want to work in care [homes].

Medeea’s case contrasts with Avram’s in terms of their background, but less regarding their views on discrimination and the British. A woman in her early thirties at the time of the interview, she arrived in the UK soon after Romania’s Accession to the UK in 2007. She represents the ‘typical’ migrant who felt ‘at home’ in the UK: she speaks fluent English, has a British partner, plans to stay permanently in the UK and visits Romania very rarely. Unlike Avram, her reasons to migrate were not of economic nature, but cultural motivations. In fact, like a few other participants, Medeea arrived as a tourist in London and was hosted by a family friend for a few days. Although not everyone initially arrived in the UK for holiday purposes, Medeea’s story resonates with a majority of participants: the decision to stay in the UK was spontaneous, rather than economically planned, thus contrasting with Avram’s case. Migrants, as all humans, are not fully rational economic beings. Despite often being assumed to be such, their purpose is not limited to ‘taking British jobs and welfare’, as some politicians and commentators passionately argue. While exploring London’s high streets, young Medeea enjoyed ‘the culture’ so much that she decided to make UK her home. The freedom she felt in the UK - as opposed to needing to maintain a ‘fake’ image in terms of her appearance in Romania - was what ultimately made her decide to seek work in the UK:

*I liked the fact no one stared at me on the street, they were not interested that I am there. I was just one amongst many, which does not happen in Romania. If something is not right in the way you are dressed […] everyone looks at you and judges you […]. And that moment [was when] I decided I will remain here.*

However, even with an initial positive outlook, Medeea’s journey did not lack difficulties. Despite having a degree in Mathematics and Physics from a top Romanian university, she had to ‘start from the bottom’. She recalled the first months in London, when she was working in a coffee shop without an insurance number or other documentation. She was scared because police began to check businesses for illegal workers, so she quit her job and began to study for a professional qualification in care. She then started from zero as a social care worker, advancing in the sector as years passed by. She reached a managerial level at the time of the interview. However, at
no point in her journey did Medeea use her Romanian qualification. Her case illustrates the well-researched issue of Eastern EU migrant downskilling in the UK.\textsuperscript{41}

Similar to Avram, throughout her years as a migrant, Medeea noted negative portrayals of Romanians in the British media, and by some British locals as well. The most common form of discrimination identified was the negative reaction when disclosing her nationality. This applied to a majority of participants who mentioned they felt discriminated. Before meeting her British partner, she used dating websites. Medeea often received negative responses when disclosing her nationality to potential dates:

*When I told them I was Romanian, the only thing young people knew about Romanians was gypsies... and they told me jokes about gypsies. Or vampires [...] I just met one single guy who knew about Ceausescu and this was because he liked history and studied a lot of history.*

Nevertheless, despite negative stereotypes of Romanians affecting her, Medeea, as the majority in the sample, was quick to endorse negative stereotypes about co-nationals. Seeing herself as an integrated, fully functional member of society, she particularly targeted ‘unintegrated Romanians’. Medeea shared Avram’s view: fellow Romanians are appreciated for their work and their economic contributions to the UK, but not culturally. While Avram emphasised learning to be (or pretending to be, for that matter) politically correct as the main pillar of integration, for Medeea being integrated primarily meant showing confidence with the English language. This represented another empirical illustration of what forms the distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ inside a migrant group can take.

Contrasting with Avram, who spoke Romanian every day, Medeea mentioned how she only had short conversations in Romanian ‘one or two times a week’. Most of her friends were British or of other nationalities. When asked why she did not have more Romanian friends, she justified: ‘I did not ever have problems with other nations in the same way I had with Romanians’. Before meeting her partner, she lived in a shared house with co-nationals. Negative experiences happened: some items, including food, were stolen from her and she was labelled ‘a prostitute’ just because she earned more money than her housemates. These negative encounters prompted Medeea to ‘avoid Romanians’. Nevertheless, as most other participants, a classed distinction was drawn between Romanians whom she wanted to avoid and those she still considered becoming friends with. Her stereotype of ‘low class’ Romanians was illustrated in the following comments:

*I know I do not have a good opinion about Romanians […] but the people who come here […] the majority are not very educated […] and they do not try to change, to integrate, to learn another lifestyle, they remain close-minded, just the same as when they left […] They are looking for ‘places in a room’ [‘loc in cameră’ in Romanian i.e. sharing a room with one or more roommates]. I cannot understand that, how could you want a place in a room with a person you haven’t met in your life, or with ten others? […] [Interviewer: Why do you think they do that?] Because they want to save as much money as possible to go to Romania and show off.*

\textsuperscript{41} For a review of the concept of downskilling, see, for example, King et al, “International Youth Mobility,” 28-30.
Medeea thought that living in overcrowded houses was a choice Romanians made in order to save as much money as possible and ‘show off’ upon their return in Romania. Throughout the interview, she did not seem to acknowledge there were cases of Romanians who did not find themselves in poor housing for that particular reason. Similarly, not learning English was seen as strictly an individual’s responsibility. In this sense, the most apparent similarity with Avram is drawn: Medeea also thought discrimination was justified in some circumstances. She thought it was common sense that the British locals ‘judge’ Romanians who did not speak English well:

*I know a lot of Romanians who have been here for 10, 15, 20 years and they do not speak English at all. How can you even expect not to be judged? If you do not want to live the lifestyle of the people here, you do not want to integrate, then they will judge you, of course.*

In addition to knowledge of English and living conditions, another argument for the classed differentiations is how Medeea visually described Romanians. She thought the British negatively perceive the ‘visible’ Romanians only, those who distinguished themselves particularly through clothing, as well as antisocial behaviour:

*The clothing style, it is very flashy, they wear stuff so people see it is branded, everywhere, those baggy jeans, cut, bleached […] [the Romanian] buys everything which has [brand logos] on it, the biggest possible, so people can see it.*

These descriptions are consistent with Moore’s findings on what British people think of East Europeans in terms of their appearance. On a broader level, they also relate to the ‘chav’ stereotype in Britain, which is based on perceptions class. Similar to the Romanians described by Medeea, the derogatory term ‘chav’ generally refers to young, and most frequently male, ‘lower-class’ Brits, who dress and speak loudly, and behave antisocially.

Medeea felt treated unfairly by the British who labelled her a gypsy, but at the same time she justified why some co-nationals were rightly seen negatively in the society. But what did Medeea think about the British? Similar to Avram, Medeea supported the stereotypes of British people as lazy. Speaking about the (then imminent) EU referendum, she expressed worry that she won’t find trained staff in care, if fewer EU migrants were allowed in the UK after Brexit. ‘The British do not want to work in care’, she concluded. Before that, she described how she spoke to British people who preferred to stay on benefits instead of working in low-paid, stressful or difficult jobs. Most of my participants said they know or heard of more British people living on state benefits than Romanians. This made them believe Romanians were unfairly associated with welfare abuse in some media and political discourses in the UK.

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42 Moore, "Shades of whiteness?".

43 See, for example, Jones, “Chavs”. Chavs tend to be described as young, white British men, who live in council homes, are usually unemployed and take social benefits. Particular (sportswear) brands and styles have been iconic for defining the ‘chav’ stereotype in the UK. It seems that often the ‘undesirable Romanians’ are described by my participants in similar terms.
Concluding thoughts

We are not tolerant as a nation, but we want others to tolerate us.

The comment above was made by one of my participants. Corina, a woman in her late thirties working in London, arrived to this conclusion after encountering prejudiced Romanians. She saw ‘both sides’ of the story: if one wants to avoid negative experiences, such as discrimination, one has to be tolerant towards others. I deliberately included her statement in the title of this paper - Corina’s thought is an oversimplified, narrow, yet indicative view on Romanians’ experiences of discrimination in the UK and their own attitudes towards the people living in the receiving society.

After analysing the transcripts and observations, I could not go as far as Corina’s interpretation. In any case, from a methodological point of view, qualitative data from forty-five participants cannot make such general claims. However, the data illustrated a contradictory discourse of Romanian interviewees. On the one hand, they saw themselves as victims of unfair media propaganda and often faced discriminatory experiences in employment circumstances or simply in everyday life. On the other hand, the same Romanians who had these experiences usually stereotyped other groups. Whether the views expressed in the were shaped by ‘double standards’, were a reaction to feeling discriminated, emerged from essentialist views, were consequences of negative experiences, post-communist ideologies, or a mix of all those factors is opened to debate.44

The two paragraphs above were adapted from my dissertation’s conclusion. After looking again at the data and analysis for writing this paper, one explanation stood out. Perhaps Romanians’ attitudes were not so contradictory after all when a class dimension is taken into account. Participants did not merely endorse the stereotypes about Romanians as a migrant group (such as being culturally different, criminal, et cetera). They accepted the stereotypes for a ‘low class’ category of Romanians, for a ‘Romanian other’, and not for ‘those like them’. As the two case studies illustrated, discrimination was justified for particular sub-groups of ‘unwilling to integrate’ Romanians, and it was unacceptable in regards to hard-working, well-paid, English speaking, functional and ‘participating’ members of society as they perceived themselves to be. Following a similar logic, those white, middle-class Britons were generally positively seen by my participants. However, the perspectives changed when it was about the British who apply for state benefits, those who do not follow an acceptable lifestyle in participants’ views, or those from racial, ethnic and religious minorities. Perhaps labelling findings as ‘attitudes towards the British’ and ‘attitudes towards co-nationals’ was the first limitation. This disabled a comprehensive picture on attitudes towards different types of people, who are situated inside a symbolic space which we, sometimes unhelpfully, label as a group. Seeing those attitudes and stereotypes through a class discourse transcends group labelling and makes it comparable with other migrant-local relations.

At the same time, categories taken for granted, such as ‘the higher educated, the less prejudiced’, have to be seen critically too. As illustrated throughout the data, participants’ self-perception of worth was more important

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44 Discussing those potential influences in detail goes beyond the scope of this paper. However they merit further investigation.
than formal education in shaping their views. Avram, like other participants, did not have a degree, but he criticised his co-nationals with the same education level. In his view, he ‘tried hard enough’ to secure a well-paid job, in which formal tertiary education was not essential. In a comparable way, for Medeea, education meant knowledge of the English language and appropriate social behaviour in the UK, which did not necessarily mean a degree. The ‘high-skill’ and ‘low-skill’ categories of migrants are almost always used by the media and politicians when talking about what migrants are welcomed in a country, with a clear preference for the high-skilled. Considering that these categories are almost always solely based on the migrants’ formal education level, further reflection on defining and categorising migration should be undertaken. This is particularly relevant because a migrant’s degree does not lead immediately to a high-paid, desired or even satisfactory job, as Medeea’s story illustrated. Yet others, such as Avram, managed to secure a highly-paid job immediately without a degree.

**Afterthought**

Will these findings look similar if the study is repeated after the UK exits the EU? It is probably safe to make the assumption that negative attitudes towards migrants will be further legitimised, especially if EU regulations and recommendations regarding tolerance and diversity cease to be part of the UK’s legal system. In the case of Romanians, discrimination experiences did not seem to decline after they gained full rights to work in 2014. It is unlikely their experiences will become more positive after Brexit. However, an accurate picture on how this will happen, and to what extent it will affect the relations between EU migrants and locals, is impossible to draw at this moment.

In the autumn of 2016, I followed up on some participants’ stories. Romanians who did not even know who the UK Prime Minister was when we first met could be teaching UK politics at the time of our second formal conversation. From those second round of and observations, as well as informal conversations with others, it seems to me that overall Romanians have become more politically aware, engaged and prepared to apply for the proper residence documents. Looking at the record levels of permanent residency and citizenship applications, it is clear that a large proportion of EU migrants will try to remain in the UK, whatever may happen after 2019. Migrant organisations, both formal and informal, are helping EU nationals in their bureaucratic journey to secure their status in the UK. As for migrants’ attitudes towards the British, it seems that the best way to relieve tensions is by meaningful contacts, through which people can challenge their stereotypical thinking, which often has its roots in lack of experience.
and misinformation. A two-way conversation, in academic research as well as in everyday life, speaking to both British-born and migrants in the UK, has great potential to build a more cohesive society - even a post-Brexit one.

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From European ‘Free-movers’ to Circular Labourers: Bulgarian Migration Experiences to the UK and Back
by Polina Manolova

Abstract
Bulgarian migration to the UK has been consistently increasing since the country’s EU accession and removal of barriers to free movement and labour across the EU. The continued popularity of the UK as a migration destination despite the multiplicity of hurdles faced by Bulgarian immigrants poses a paradox that cannot be explained with the ‘push-pull’ and cost-benefit calculation models prevailing in migration research. In its attempts to provide a better understanding of people’s decisions to migrate and different migration patterns this article challenges existing scholarly explanations by analysing ethnographic material dedicated to the pre- and post-migratory experiences of Bulgarian working class migrants. By exploring the effects of the informal institutional restrictions faced by Bulgarian newcomers after January 2014 the article reveals a mechanism through which permanent settlement has been limited in favour of circular labour mobility. The benefits of such regulating mechanisms for the capitalist state have come at the expense of migrants’ longings for a ‘normal’ existence.

Key words: circular migration, working-class, free movement, illegality, Brexit.

Introduction
The accession of Bulgaria to the European Union in 2007 has initiated a period of intensive emigration. The so-called ‘global economic crisis’ of 2008 has led to another ‘peak’ of intra-European mobility, during which Bulgarians’ movements shifted from ‘traditional’ destinations such as Spain, Italy and Greece to the United Kingdom and Germany. In the past few years, the UK has turned from a country unknown, remote and relatively unattractive to Bulgarians into one of the most preferred migration destinations. Since January 2014, when Bulgarians were given the full right to live and work in the UK, we have witnessed another period of relative upsurge in the number of newcomers. Meanwhile, migrants find themselves struggling in a world of proliferating symbolic and material borders and increasingly sophisticated forms of exploitation, violence, and subjugation. In the past years, Bulgarians have been Bulgarian Emigration in the UK; in European Dimensions of Culture and History on the Balkans, ed. Margarita Karamihova (Sofia: Paradigma, 2010).

3 Mila Maeva, ‘Organizations and Institutions of

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in the spotlight of British (and Western European) anti-immigration discourses constructing Eastern European migrants as ‘abusers’ of social benefits who make little to no positive contribution to the local economy. Despite the status and rights that come with their European citizenship, structural violence and discrimination continue to confine the majority of Bulgarian migrants to exploitative jobs in the informal economy and to a precarious existence at the margins of British society. These realities have received increasing attention in Bulgarian and global media, as well as in the stories told by return migrants, warning potential newcomers of the multiple hardships awaiting them. Yet the number of Bulgarians who wish to embark on such journeys is still growing year by year. What we are witnessing is a paradox of ‘popularity despite uncertainty’ in which a substantial number of Bulgarians continue to imagine their future in an increasingly suspicious and hostile Western Europe.

So far, scholarship on Bulgarian migration to the ‘West’ and the UK in particular has failed to grasp the complexities and contradictions of contemporary migration movements and their motivations. Studies dedicated to revealing the reasons behind Bulgarian emigration generally conform to the ‘economic reductionism’ characteristic of Eastern European migration research in general. Scholars tend to over-emphasize and generalise the importance of micro- and/or macroeconomic factors and pay less attention to the interplay between individual and structural reasons that underlie the difficult choice between ‘leaving’ and ‘staying’. In addition, Bulgarian migration experts and researchers very often partake in the use of normatively charged and politically useful dichotomies between the ‘economic’ migrations of classic labour migrants (usually denoted by value-laden terms such as ‘low’ migrants, (deficits, Gastarbeiter, gurbetchii) and, on the other hand, the transnational mobility of the ‘highly-skilled’ and educated ones (intelligensia, professionals, new Bulgarians).

This distinction between these two different migrant types is persistently reproduced in the discussion of different patterns of migration as well as in discussions of the temporariness and circularity of intensifying East-West movements. The so-called ‘incomplete’ migration defined as short-term labour mobility is attributed to ‘poor’ migrants whose strategies are said to revolve around quick money-making stays in the West and periods of status-building consumption. The migrants’ as-

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10 Richard Black et al., eds, A Continent Moving West? EU Enlargement and Labour Migration from Central and Eastern Europe (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).
13 Ivaylo Ditchev, ‘Mobile identities? Mobile citi-
assumed lack of long-term plans for settlement are usually contributed to their lack of cosmopolitanism – locally-bound identities, inadequate skills and cultural capital which ultimately make their successful integration into the host society impossible. At the same time migrants’ own unwillingness and lack of ambition to invest efforts into social advancement in the host society is pointed out as responsible for their short-term perspectives. The self-inflicted marginality of ‘low’ migrants is often contrasted to the long-term plans of ‘educated’ and ‘high-skilled’ individuals ready to put in hard work and ambition into achieving personal and professional realisation.

The aim of the present article is to challenge such problematic categorizations and interpretations that sadly continue to dominate the scientific discourse on post-accession Eastern European migration. By following the migration experiences of two Bulgarian men with working-class origins, I will shed light on the migration motivations of this particular social group. As I will argue, this can help debunk the simplified economic logic predominant in Eastern European migration research so far. Both case studies show how migration decisions are informed by accumulated dissatisfaction with postsocialist hardships and the apparent impossibility of my respondents to achieve individual and social aspirations in their home country. The inability to find adequate employment determined by lack of marketable skills or social connections, the growing desire to achieve different forms of middle-class status and the demeaning attitude of employers are all factors constituting a precarious social position which would-be Bulgarian migrants are desperately trying to escape.

Their plans for long-term settlement in the British society are structured by expectations of a certain kind of ‘normality’ of life which they juxtaposed to unbearable living conditions in Bulgaria. However, as I will show, the institutional hurdles that migrants encounter upon entering the UK force many into the existing informal labour market in which particularly exploitative working arrangements predominate – a no-win situation which foils the migration strategies of even those who eventually manage to become ‘legal’ workers. I demonstrate how the inability to permanently settle in the UK is not only conditioned by subjective factors, as previous research would have us believe, but is due to the structural violence inflicted upon the migrants by informal institutional arrangements and everyday discrimination. Thus, shortly upon their arrival my respondents were subjected to daily reminders of their ‘incomplete’ European-ness in their encounters with British institutions, employers and fellow-migrants and felt pushed into a subordinate position of second-class citizens.

I will embed this insight into a macro perspective by arguing that the mechanisms through which migrants are forced into circular migration - institutional discrimination, de facto inaccessibility of living wage labour and the expansion of a short-term, precarious employment sector - are part of an increasingly sophisticated system of capitalist labour reproduction. This interpretation breaks with

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14 Ibid
16 Ibid
postmodern attempts of romanticizing highly-mobile identities as beneficial for all those who adopt them, and instead laments how the ideological attraction of ‘free movement’ regulations reproduces circular labour power that is highly beneficial for the capitalist state while detrimental for those who are forced to do it. In conclusion, I will link this critical insight back to the current debate in order to show how migrants’ livelihoods and strategies are affected by the socio-political pre-Brexit climate. I will argue that scholarship on East European migration will have to inquire about and reflect on the realities encountered by migrants in order to move beyond the objectifying and alienating discourse that currently dominates both the political and scholarly debate.

Pre-migration dreams, hopes and uncertainties

This empirical section starts with presentation of two different stories, those of Stoyko and Dino. They both exemplify the pre-migration expectations and motivations that were relevant for the majority of the people I spoke to. The article then continues by exploring the experiences of both men upon their arrival in the UK. 18

Stoyko

Stoyko was a male in his mid-forties living in a large Bulgarian city with his wife and one-year-old daughter. When the ‘change’ 19 happened, he was a second-year student in the local Agrarian University. Stoyko never managed to complete his studies as he was urged into pursuing any low-skilled employment he could get his hands on to help his family make ends meet during the dramatic socioeconomic upheaval throughout the (early) nineties. He claimed he did not really regret this change of fate, as he had no interest in agronomy to start with. Instead he was very enticed to seize the private business opportunities which, as the popular narrative of the time had it, promised to turn every quickly-adaptable postsocialist individual into a middle-class entrepreneur. This status proved to be unattainable, however, as during the past twenty something years

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18 This article is based on interviews and participant observation taken from a larger dataset collected during year-long ethnographic fieldwork between 2013 and 2014 in different localities in Bulgaria and the UK. I started by exploring the aspirations and expectations of prospective Bulgarian migrants who had long-term plans to settle in the UK. By accompanying people throughout their journeys, I was able to account for their experiences in the UK and investigate whether the realities of life abroad matched or contradicted their pre-migration ideas.

19 A vernacular term denoting the political and socio-economic transformation of 1989 and the fall of the Communist regime in Bulgaria.
Stoyko engaged in a remarkable array of entrepreneurial and waged employment activities: builder, agricultural worker, wine and olive oil trader, tourist agent, real estate agent, and production worker. His most recent attempt to finally land on the ‘right track’ to middle-class normality was a cleaning business which he started despite his wife’s aversion. The orders quickly picked up at the start of 2008 only to come to a painful downfall a year later when the effects of the global economic crisis hit Bulgaria. At the time of our first meeting in 2014 Stoyko was registered as unemployed and supplemented the meagre benefit he received with sporadic small favours to friends and family to whom he borrowed his former cleaning van. It was only possible for the family to make ends meet because of the monthly maternity allowance Stoyko’s wife was entitled to and the money and provisions regularly sent by his parents.

When I met Stoyko, he seemed to have lost all of the enthusiasm and ambition that had kept him going throughout the ‘transition’. He made an overall impression of being frustrated and struggling with a sense of personal failure. Looking back to the past – a time of ‘wasted youth’ and ‘chasing windmills’ – was painful, as was the present - full of regrets for being naïve enough to believe that life would ever become ‘normal’ in Bulgaria. He tried to express the disillusionment and despair accumulated throughout the ‘reforms’ as follows:

I am just so tired of trying anymore. She [his wife] is right; things can never work out for us. I don’t know if it is because of me – I clearly lack inner motivation to go on, or it is because of the way things are in this country. For some [people] there will always be enough, others [the majority] are left to their own devices. It is survival of the fittest, only those who manage to adapt will make it. Even if both of us [him and his wife] work it will never be enough for more than paying our bills [...] You have a house, a nice family but you don’t feel like a normal person. What kind of life is this?

Stoyko and his wife agreed that migration to the UK was their ‘last hope’ for having the ‘normal’ life they imagined and unsuccessfully tried to achieve for themselves and their small daughter. Their claims that they were ‘sick of living with little’ and always ‘counting their pennies’ were time and again – in almost paradoxical manner – contradicted by sporadic confessions that they had ‘nothing to complain about’ as they ‘had everything they needed’, backed up with an enumeration of their family assets – a home of their own (inherited from his wife’s mother), freshly decorated and filled with all necessary electrical appliances – ‘even a dishwasher’, a car – ‘not new but not too bad either’, a village home for summer holidaying and fresh weekly deliveries from Stoyko’s parents’ plot in the countryside. The seeming inconsistency in their claims, one which I observed in the narratives of many other would-be migrants in situations similar to theirs, becomes understandable when one tries to interpret what was implied in the notion of economic deprivation that Stoyko and his wife underlined as a main ‘push’ reason behind their migration plans. Here, economic deprivation, usually denoted with the emic term ‘survival’ (otceliavane) was not seen as threatening their social reproduction but as leaving no disposable income for ‘extra’ spending. They, as well as many other Bulgarians, were thus unable to answer to the social pressure to engage in consumption patterns constituting perceived symbols of ‘middle-class’-ness such as regular trips.
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abroad, branded clothing and accessories, the latest mobile phones and electronic gadgets and appliances. The urgency of possessing such materiality was not necessarily in its capacity to ensure one’s physical well-being but in its value as status symbol. In this sense, while perceiving themselves as ‘flawed’ consumers within the local community, many of my respondents saw migration as a strategy of overcoming their symbolic marginality in a society that boasted the ‘success’ of the ambiguous politico-economic elite and prioritized the needs of a western-minded ‘intellectual’ class.

Dino

Although much younger than Stoyko and still single, Dino shared similar feelings of discontent with his present situation and with the impossibility to achieve a desired ‘normality’, which underpinned his migration desires. Dino was twenty-six years old and came from a working-class family from a small town in northwest Bulgaria, not too far from the capital Sofia where he moved to obtain a diploma for a railway transport technician from a specialized college. He hoped that this particular education would enable him to obtain employment in the forthcoming construction of the Sofia underground. His job aspirations were soon scalded when upon the completion of his unpaid six-months training in the ‘Metropolitan’ he was unashamedly told that the positions had long been ‘reserved’ for ‘well-connected’ people. This moment left an imprint on his youthful aspirations and led him to conclude that there was ‘nothing’ left (no opportunities for professional realisation and decent living) in Bulgaria for ‘those like himself’ (of working-class and provincial background, without meaningful social capital and university qualifications). Regrettably, the years to come only proved his impression right by adding new nuances to an already seemingly bleak future. Since his graduation, Dino constantly juggled two, sometimes three part-time jobs which were just enough to ‘keep him going’ in Sofia. At the time we first met, he was working night shifts as a guard in the British embassy and delivering coffee to grocery shops and cafes during the day. The lack of sleep and the constant worries about money left him exhausted and with little time to invest in socializing and pastime activities. What he found harder to endure though was the demeaning treatment he was given by employers and co-workers who seemed to have no respect for the efforts he put in doing a ‘good job’:

The embassy job is not a problem; after all they [the British] are civilized people but on the other job it is different. They just treat you like a dog because you come from the province and you don’t have a university degree. It is not just my boss [sighs], you must see those clients I work with; some of them act as if they own me. If I am a bit late or something they are ready to start a fight and the words they call you [...] it is just unbearable!

The combination of low payment and disrespectful attitude that made Dino wish to ‘leave it all behind and start anew’ was intensified by the moral quandary that some of his job obligations presented him with. He was often required to sweet-talk customers into increasing their orders by presenting them with false promises and deceitful information or protect the back of colleagues who refused to conscientiously observe their duties. For Dino economic and social success in Bulgarian society was only possible for the morally flexible,

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those who had a ‘good back’ (connections) and who were ready to succumb to the rules of the (market) game and obtain leverage at any price (often at the expense of a hard-working majority). This was the reason why, unlike Stoyko, Dino never felt like engaging in any kind of entrepreneurial activity. Dino’s unwillingness to follow socially established practices for achieving ‘normal’ well-being condemned him to economic and symbolic humiliation. His migration appeared as conditioned by his desire for restoring feelings of self-worth and dignity and escaping a position of social and economic subordination.

For both of my respondents migration appeared to be a strategy of escaping their ‘transitional’, lives defined by dissatisfaction and growing despair with the impossibility to reach the ‘normal’ life they had hoped for. When trying to provide insight into migrants’ motivations one needs to go beyond explanations related to the socio-economic and political forces, in order to understand people’s subjective preoccupations with dignity and a sense of ‘moving forward’ in life. The visions of the would-be migrants show how ideas of what life should be like are projected onto imaginations attracting migrants to particular destinations. As Sarah Mahler argues in her ethnography of Central and South American migrants to the US, migration is always a result of two mutually constituting forces – the structural factors that uproot individuals from their ‘customary forms of life’ in their homelands and mythologized visions of a certain ‘promised land’ that structure their aspirations for a better future. Building on this approach, I take the constant references to ‘normality’ in the narratives of my respondents as underpinning their longings and aspirations related to an imagined attainable future in the UK. The ‘normality’ they expected to obtain in the UK referred to a broad set of normative evocations usually experienced as ‘lacking’ in a present state of ‘abnormality’ in Bulgaria. Evocations of normality were thus constructed along longings for order and stability; universal availability of a ‘decent’ middle-class living standard and a sense of human dignity stemming from respectable work-related identities.

Notwithstanding the high hopes my respondents associated with their new lives in the UK, they were also aware that migration was a risky endeavour – a leap into the unknown – demanding considerable financial and emotional resources. Migration journeys necessitated investments often beyond the means of most families that was thus often obtained from money landers/loan sharks, consumer credits and more rarely friends and family. Cases in which people had to selloff movables, like cars, laptops, and mobile phones in order to cover travel costs were not uncommon. That was coupled with the fact that before departure many chose to quit stable but low-paying employment. This made migration a high-risk endeavour and a point of no return. The stakes were high for those decided to leave Bulgaria but their hopes for securing a better future for themselves and their families outweighed the fear of the unknown. Although rarely verbalized, the apprehensions and uncertainties were evidently persistent in their strategies. Without exception, all of those I spoke to were alarmed by the possible stigmatization that the UK anti-immigration campaign (explicitly directed towards Bulgarians and Romanians) might provoke upon their arrival. At the same time, my respondents un-

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derlined their individual responsibility in dis-
persing negative misconceptions that British
media instilled upon an overall tolerant and
accepting British population. They expressed
confidence that they would quickly be able
to prove their ‘properness’ through hard and
dedicated labour. In fact, almost no one of the
people I met with accepted the ‘migrant’ label
before their departure. This term was associat-
ed with a negative meaning for many, making
them prefer to identify as ‘free-movers’ and
‘European citizens’. In the following section I
will show how this genuine belief in the rights
and freedoms of ‘free movement’ was disap-
pointed on multiple counts, making Bulgar-
ians realise that they were not only migrants
but in fact also second-class EU citizens, for
whom the UK labour market had little more in
stock than illegal employment and a marginal,
precarious existence.

‘Illegal’ EU migrants

The hardship and vulnerability that marked
the beginning of what my respondents be-
lieved to be a ‘fresh start’ often went far be-
yond their worst fears. Some of the tough les-
sons that migrants had to learn in the early
days and months after their arrival were re-
lated to the bureaucratic conundrums that
made obtaining all the necessary documents
a painful experience with often no end in
sight, meaning that starting a full-time, legal
employment was usually impossible. Anyone
seeking legal employment in the UK require a
national insurance number (NINo) and a bank
account. For most of the Bulgarians I met, the
NINo interview, imagined as a ‘tick-box’ ex-
ercise, turned into a traumatic first encounter
with British institutions.22 The right to use an
interpreter during the interview or the help
of an English-speaking friend was denied to
many of those I spoke to. They were often
scolded for not speaking English. The weeks – in some cases months – after the interview
were marked by apprehension and insecurity
as they waited for the decision which would
determine their future socio-economic mobil-
ity. In some cases, the NI-number was granted
only after months of unjustified rejections and
painstaking re-applications.

For many, setting up a bank account proved
to be the real challenge. Along with other
documentation, most banks required a proof
of address for creating an account. Although
much depended on the specific bank and the
employee, common options included a main-
tenance bill in one’s name, a tenancy agree-
ment, or a NINo(!). These were unattainable

22 Many Bulgarian immigrants had the feeling
that obtaining a NINo became much more difficult in
the months up to and after January 2014. They reported
that they perceived increased rates of refusals and an
overall delay.
for many Bulgarians. Migrants often stayed with friends or rented a room with unregistered landlords, as legal renting was expensive and required references and background checks. Even those who managed to provide all the necessary documents were often denied a bank account. After receiving consecutive rejections despite having all the necessary documents and literally begging banks to cooperate, many of those I spoke to found themselves forced to use the paid services of fellow Bulgarians who promise to issue a bank account within less than a day.

Both Stoyko and Dino, who possessed limited amounts of migrant capital in the form of trusted networks and English language skills, followed the negative trajectory of the early migrant experience. Stoyko came to London after a friend (a ‘successful’ Bulgarian migrant) got him a ‘secured’ job and accommodation only to discover that the cleaning job was ‘no longer available’ and the weekly rent for the shared room was higher than previously negotiated. Left to his own devices, Stoyko had little choice but to pay a month’s rent in advance and do his best to ‘sort’ his documents and find employment. The arrangement of the NINo interview took several lengthy and expensive phone calls, and the interview itself proved to be a challenging first encounter with the British authorities: without the presence of an official translator he understood almost nothing of what the interviewer said. However, he was able to discern the employee’s annoyance with his lack of language skills. When he called me a day after the interview Stoyko was clearly distressed and asked me to interpret the behavior of the interviewer, as he was still unsure whether his documents were accepted or had been rejected on the spot. A month later with still no news from the authorities, Stoyko prompted me to call on his behalf and check on the progress of his documentation: ‘It is like waiting for my death sentence. I am so nervous, I just don’t understand why they keep me waiting for so long.’ On the phone the emotionless employee provided me with the formal reply: ‘As we are processing a large number of documents, the issuing of NINo might take anything from four to eight weeks’.

Around that same time, Dino had visited all the banks known as Bulgarian-friendly to no avail. The opening of a bank account was implicitly refused as the employees kept requiring more and more documents. At some point Dino was told he was not eligible for a bank account as he was unable to provide a visa proving his legal right to stay in the country(!). Although they were by law European citizens with the right to reside and work in the UK, the lack of necessary documents gave my respondents the status of illegal workers which foreclosed their chances for socio-economic mobility in British society. It should be noted that Bulgarians, as all other EU nationals, can be legally employed for a period of up to two months before obtaining their NINo. Most of those I spoke to were unaware or fearful to make use of this right. Additionally, recruitment agencies and local employers used the absence of a NINo as a pretext for not hiring newcomers. British and Bulgarian employers and gang leaders often tricked them into exploitative and informal cash-in-hand jobs in construction, car washing, leaflet distribution, and cleaning. Such jobs usually paid between £35 and £40 for a ten- to twelve-hour workday—less than half of the national minimum wage.

In the first two months after his arrival while...
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waiting for his NINo, Stoyko alternated between days/weeks of painful waiting and short spells of underpaid exploitative cash-in-hand jobs. This was common for many Bulgarian male migrants. He spent a week working on a construction site as a painter and another three weeks working in a car wash where he was paid £35 for an eleven hours working day. He told me his monthly expenses amounted to £600. For the two months in the UK he only managed to make a little over £1000, which meant that he was not only unable to save enough to bring his family over, but in fact had to borrow extra cash from a friend back home. When he finally acquired his NINo, Stoyko was told he needed to obtain a self-employed status in order to enrol in a recruitment agency providing jobs in the construction sector. The ‘false self-employment’ practiced by many British and immigrant companies was highly beneficial for the businesses, while placing workers in a precarious situation with no guaranteed minimum hours per week, no entitlement to the ‘national living wage’, no employment rights, etc. This status also burdened them with extra accounting costs and taxes. While realising the unfairness of the situation, Stoyko admitted to have limited alternatives as all ‘proper’ jobs required English or an initial financial investment which he could not afford. In the next few months the irregularity and low pay of the jobs coerced him into spending a month or two in London working as many hours as he could and waiting out on ‘quite’ months (when there were less jobs on offer) back in Bulgaria.

Dino’s immigration trajectory was somehow different although it ultimately led to the same end-result. He left for North England to work as a chicken catcher\textsuperscript{24}, a job was recruited for through a Bulgarian agency charging a fee of £300. Upon arrival, he discovered that the working and living conditions had little to do with the promises of the agency and the neat video clips they used in presenting the job. Work started at six in the morning or earlier when a bus collected the workers and took them miles away to different farms in the area. The backbreaking labour continued till late at night with a single lunchbreak of twenty minutes. Dino and five other Bulgarian workers shared two rooms in a rundown farm shed without running water and electricity for which he had to pay £60 per week. When he called the agency two weeks later to complain about the inhumane work conditions, he was told that he should have been more careful before signing up the contract as the job was not for the faint-hearted. A week later Dino was forced to come back home as his health had deteriorated and he felt unable to undergo the demeaning treatment of his employers. Half a year later, Dino, still determined to try his luck in the UK, left with a six-month contract with a Bulgarian sub-contractor to work in a solar panel field in central England. This time there was no fee required and he had been given an advance payment already in the first week of his employment. The work was hard but the general conditions and attitude of the supervisors, all of whom were Bulgarian, were way better than in his previous experience. The job was, however, temporary and required him to spend another half a year in Bulgaria before he embarked on another job with the same sub-contractor. Dino’s ultimate goal was to permanently settle in London but he realised that without a NINo, bank account, any knowledge of English and no trusted friends the chances of modern slavery: https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/jun/10/court-finds-uk-gangmaster liable-for-modern-slavery-victims-kent-chicken-catching-eggs

\textsuperscript{24} For very similar discription of the working conditions of chicken catchers, see Guardian’s report on
of him losing all of his savings while trying to settle there were quite high.

A number of Bulgarian migrants who just like Stoyko and Dino came to the UK with the intention to settle permanently and with the hope of experiencing a much desired ‘normal’ life found their prospects to be limited by a number of invisible structural mechanisms that they had little control over. Being stripped off their civic, social and labour rights, highly vulnerable migrants were entrapped into an exploitable informal labour market. In addition, they commonly suffered limitations related to their lack of language and other skills, stigmatization within the immigrant community, formal and informal discriminatory practices and general public hostility. The combination of unexpectedly high cost of living and low earnings meant that migrants were very often on the brink of survival - unable to repay debts incurred before migrating, to remit money back home, or to save enough to bring over their families. Thus, initial plans for permanent settlement often turned out to be unfeasible, and the only possibility to generate surplus income became circular migration: in order to avoid long and costly periods of unemployment while in the UK, short stays in Bulgaria were used to secure jobs and living arrangements in advance.

**Internalization of inferiority and intragroup hostility**

The dubious legal status, early experiences of marginality, and stigmatizing public discourses filled my respondents with fear, insecurity, and disillusionment. Looking at the lives of others within the immigrant community, they started to perceive their situation as unexceptional and embedded in perceived natural laws that determine the immigrant trajectory. Many of those I spoke to admitted feeling defenceless, ignorant and out of place, incapable of resolving even the simplest tasks, and often dependent on co-immigrants who cashed out on their vulnerability. In the eyes of many Bulgarians, the UK started to seem grim and unwelcoming, filled with traps that necessitated self-protection. The fear of conforming to the stigma projected on them made some reluctant to use public services and social provisions even after they had managed to legalize their status in the UK.

Eva, forty-one, who worked in a factory, for example, regularly consulted her GP back in Bulgaria instead of registering with a local medical practice. She explained her reluctance to do so with a general feeling of “uneasiness” whenever communicating with locals. This psychological barrier, as she told me, came not only from her poor command of English but also from the fear of being seen as an abuser of free health care. For similar reasons, during her first year in the UK, she did not feel confident looking for a job and even found it hard to leave the house. Stoyko reported similar feelings related to his unwillingness to spend time off work outside of his shared accommodation. Every social situation was a potential source of embarrassment and humiliation which he tried to avoid at any cost.
He feared falling into an awkward situation in which he had to communicate his needs in English or reply to a question he was asked. He found the sheer size and crowdedness of London intimidating; moving around the city was challenging and he rarely diverted from his routine itinerary to and from work. What he feared most was getting lost and finding himself in a hostile area or having a heart attack on the underground.

In order to put these sentiments into perspective, it is useful to consider Frantz Fanon’s examination of the psychology of colonialism, which describes the emergence of an inferiority complex in the colonized subjects as a result of economic processes and psychological “epidermalization” of the cultural and intellectual supremacy of the colonizer. Bulgarian immigrants’ practices and the meanings invested in them exhibit similar processes of internalization in the adoption of self-blame narratives that attribute their inferior positions to their own cultural inadequacies; fear of humiliation and ridicule made them avoid social contact with locals whom they deemed intellectually and culturally superior. Furthermore, some who condemned exploitation and mistreatment by immigrant employers were less likely to oppose similar treatment by British. Eva, who at the end of her first year in the UK managed to muster all her confidence and started a job in a chocolate factory, spent endless nights crying because of the humiliation her Polish manager inflicted on her and her colleagues but accepted similar treatment by a British manager as “normal”: “After all he is British, so it is understandable that he acts in this way.”

The Bulgarian immigrant community was a no less hostile place. Bulgarians rarely practiced solidarity and to a great extent stayed divided in their daily struggles for survival. The struggle for scarce resources often produced voracious competition, general mistrust, and disloyalty in the community. The basis for intra-group antagonism was not only economic but rested on cultural-civilizational discourse that differentiated more and less “Westernized” subjectivities. Self-ascribed middle-class members, who emphasized their cultural and symbolic proximity to the West, tried to compensate their feelings of inferiority and recuperate lost social status by blaming their fellow Bulgarians for their own marginality. They accused them of “flooding” the British market with cheap and uneducated labor and creating a bad name for the entrepreneurially minded and well-educated Bulgarians. This othering of the “typical” Bulgarian migrants reflects and reproduces existent social and cultural divisions within Bulgarian society. This conflict between neoliberally minded elites and uneducated and backward masses is embedded in a postsocialist process of Orientalization in which large groups of the population were constructed as incapable of making the “right” civilizational choices and thus the ones to blame for the failed economic reforms. Trapped in a position of double subordination, my respondents were both conferred a marginal status of undeserving Europeans by British society, and discriminated by their fellow Bulgarians for their alleged cultural inferiority. It should be also noted, however, that despite being cautious and mistrustful against one another newcomers preferred being in a culturally-familiar environment, away from cultural and religious others.

25 See Fanon, 'Black Skin, White Masks'.

Thus, they often looked for ‘Bulgarian’ jobs and housing. Acts of solidarity and mutual cooperation were still a not so rare occurrence within the Bulgarian community still. Yet they were rarely recognized by migrants, most of whom shared a view that when abroad one should ‘stay away from compatriots’.

The reproduction of a system of migrant labor

Bulgarians had limited resources for questioning the structural exclusion and discrimination they experienced. Instead they internalized the inferiority conferred to them and came to believe that the status of a “real” European is to be deserved through hard work and major sacrifices. This ideological justification of entrenched precarity and discrimination enabled and facilitated the production of an “illegal” army of highly-mobile labourers, who, in the ideal case, would only travel to the UK for previously arranged jobs in the formal and informal labour market and thus not make use of any social support or administrative capacities, let alone welfare, in Great Britain. The benefits of this process to the British state becomes apparent when it is conceived as part of an international labor supply system that satisfies the demand for low-skilled and easily disposable labor in structurally advantaged economies. Michael Burawoy posits that the reproduction of the international labor force is only possible through the separation of maintenance and renewal processes: the costs of labor renewal (education, social provision, public services) are to be borne by the institutions of the sending state and the maintenance is organized by the receiving state. The mutual sustenance of the two processes is ensured by what Burawoy calls the interdependence of the productive and reproductive worker.27 With the implementation of different legal and political mechanisms, the receiving state entrenches the vulnerable and weak position of the migrants, their separation from their families, and the reproduction of oscillatory

movements between work and home.\footnote{Ibid.}

The migration patterns of my respondents seem to match Burawoy’s theoretical model. The opening of the UK labor market for Bulgarians in the beginning of 2014 did not bring an end to their experiences of illegality, exploitation, and marginality. On the contrary, the institutional barriers faced by the newly arrived labor migrants and their vulnerable status made them easy targets for exploitation in the informal sector of the British economy. The impossibility to produce surplus income prevents permanent settlement and reunification with family as many Bulgarians earn just enough to cover basic subsistence costs. The UK thus mobilizes a reserve army of single, able-bodied individuals, the renewal of which presents no burden to the state as only very few of these immigrants achieve the status (and gather the moral courage) to claim the social benefits and provisions that their work entitles them to.

As Burawoy further argues that, apart from economic imbalances and mechanisms of structural and legal coercion, the reproduction of a system of migrant labor is highly dependent on ideological discourses. This is how, he claims, the functions of migrant labor are misrepresented and the legitimacy of bifurcated labor markets is sustained. Bulgarian migration to the UK is driven and sustained by the myth of Europeanness and free movement as part of a collective imaginary of Western supremacy that has long persisted in the minds of Eastern Europeans. And despite the observed disillusionment of the Eastern European working class with Western futures embedded in the EU membership, the analysis presented above clearly shows that, more than ever, life in the “imaginary West” holds the promise of fulfilling all that the postsocialist transformation never delivered. Migration has become the main individual strategy for positioning one’s future in the center of the global hierarchy of places and statuses—the “West.” The construction and uncritical reproduction of the imaginary ‘West’ is embedded in a self-perpetuating ‘cycle of self-deception’\footnote{See Mahler, 'American Dreaming: Immigrant Life on the Margins.'} that my respondents became caught up in but which they at the same time performatively sustained. This cycle starts with the pre-migratory formation of expectations of life in the UK which refer to illusionary constructions deeply rooted in a centuries-old hegemonic narrative of Western supremacy that still dominate political and cultural discourses in the eastern periphery. The nourishing of such utopian visions continues to be sustained in media and political discourses in Bulgaria, although these are not the only sources of information that Bulgarian prospective migrants draw on. Paradoxically, it is the embellished stories of return migrants and the material demonstration of what is often only an ‘invented’ success that feeds into the creation of an unrealistic image of the UK. However, it should be acknowledged that in many cases when encountering a more realistic depiction of Western realities, aspiring migrants often refuse it as ill-intentioned and false. Instead of critically examining their ideas of a place they had never been to before, they chose to sustain their idealized version of the West as a place where a normal life was possible – even if dependent on hard and honest labour - and thus fled themselves into their own self-deception. Moreover, many of my respondents sustained the ‘imaginary West’ as a place offering a normal life even after experiencing the drastic contrast between the ‘imagined’ and the harsh reality full force. The zeal and perseverance...
with which they kept believing in a normality whose arrival they postponed may indeed be interpreted as a delusional, naïve and utopian hubris. However, I would argue instead that it is rather to be understood as a performative reproduction of the predominant social ideology, something akin to what Sloterdijk calls the ‘enlightened false consciousness’\textsuperscript{30}. According to this idea, people subscribe to ideological claims and reproduce them in the material practice of migration even when their illusionary nature and distance from reality is recognised (implicitly or explicitly). People thus ‘still behave as if they believe’\textsuperscript{31}. The reasons behind such a performative reproduction lie in the function of the imaginary of alleviating subjective anxieties and providing a sense of meaning and collective purpose. This is illustrated in the statement of Elena, a forty-one-year-old mother working as a nanny in London, who was hoping to be able to bring over her son and husband soon: Naturally everyone hopes that the future holds better opportunities and prosperity, this is what keeps me going; otherwise I would immediately put a halter around my neck.

\textbf{Concluding remarks}

On a warm summer evening in August 2015 during my UK fieldwork I sat down with Petya (forty-five) and her recently arrived son Ivan (twenty) in their tiny kitchen in North London. After spending months in preparation for her son’s arrival Petya was deeply frustrated with the fact that while she had managed to find him a legal job with her own British employer, she was still desperately struggling to ‘sort out’ his documents. In an ardent diatribe, she put forward a spot-on summary of the experience of perhaps most of the Bulgarian migrants in the UK:

\textit{The English don’t want us here; they don’t need any more migrants. [...] They have turned our lives into a nightmare. It is just a closed circle; they are throwing you around like a rag from one place to the next. You have no rights, only obligations. If they complain all the time that the state has to support the immigrants, then they have to give immigrants a chance to work and support themselves. They have no adequate policy on dealing with large-scale immigration. Instead, what they do is to create chaos and panic and at the same time and sustain the black economy. This is why Bulgarians fall into a pit when they come here. They start to work illegally for Bulgarian companies which pay them peanuts and often force them to live on the streets. Some have no choice but to get involved in criminal activities. This is a good scheme to chase people away but some have no alternative in Bulgaria. so they choose to stay here even under these conditions and then they sink even deeper. On paper Bulgarians and Romanians have unrestricted working rights but in reality they don’t. They are playing with peoples’ lives, because you have to apply for some number which you are not even sure you are ever going to get and they can even refuse...}


to give it to you without any further explanation because you are no one and they don’t owe you one.

Petya’s interpretation basically applies Burawoy’s migrant labour reproduction model to the case of the UK. Through the use of the equal rights ideology, the country attracts migrants only to effectively bar them from entry into the legal labour market. Positioned on a precarious threshold of society, many find themselves in a much worst off situation than the one they left behind.

In the final remarks of her condemnation of migrant suffering, Petya foresaw what neither of the three of us could have imagined back in that pleasant summer evening, but which a year later has become an increasingly realistic scenario:

I sometimes think that the visa system that we had before, you know how Bulgarians could only work with a visa in the UK was much better. [Me: Come on, do you seriously mean this?] Well, see, in the UK the message is ‘come, you have the right to work’. People fool themselves and believe they can really come and work. When they realise that in practice it is not so straightforward, it is already too late – they have quit their jobs and sink into debt. The visa system is just much more honest and fair. If they [the British] don’t want to be in the EU, they better go out. Then they will bring back the visa system and maybe it will be better, at least people would know what to expect.

Petya’s vision was not shared by most of the Bulgarian would-be and current migrants whose lives I continue to follow after the referendum of June 2016. For those who regularly remit money, who hope to raise some capital to invest back home, and for the many for whom circular migration is the only available survival strategy, the drastic ‘collapse’ of the British pound was a harsh shock. In a desperate rush to ‘legalize’ their status and ‘enroot’ themselves better in the British society some of my respondents redirected all their disposable income into ‘purchasing’ documents through the services of Bulgarian ‘accountants’. Others took on consumer credits with the hope that as long as they keep on repaying them they would not be expelled from the country. While pondering their ill fate and the possibility of facing more restrictions just two years after being granted their ‘free mover’ status, Bulgarians’ increased vulnerability made them even less militant and more susceptible to exploitation and discrimination.

The academic discussions surrounding the recent British referendum on EU membership have tried to emphasise the economic, cultural, and demographic benefits of EU migration. Such efforts, however well-intended, still feed into an instrumentalist policy perspective that constructs migrants’ lives as only important in terms of their added value for the local economy. Migration scholars, and particularly those working on East European migration, should try to shift the debate away from the prevalent macroeconomic and biopolitical framing and focus on the realities emerging out of migrants’ own narratives. Only by giving necessary attention to migrants’ own interpretations will current scholarship be able to overcome objectifying and ‘othering’ discourses that dichotomize migrants into low-skilled and voluntary temporary ‘money makers’ and educated high-achievers. Patterns of international migration can only then be conceptualized as not only dependent on subjective variables but as functional for an international system of capital accumulation.
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Abstract
The main theoretical contribution of this paper is to show that the transitional processes from circadian to post-circadian capitalist era have reduced capabilities for sociability of migrant night shift workers. It analyses the three main contributing factors to the corrosion of solidarity amongst migrant denizens: (a) the expansion of the working day into the night; (b) the major alterations of time over time, and the nurturing ground for these changes; (c) global cities, as the nurturing ground for occupational polarization.

Key words: night work, migrant solidarity, global cities, post-circadian capitalism, precarity.

In 18th century Britain, people were up and working during the night in cotton mills. During Britain’s industrialised capitalist era, British manufacturing workers worked night shifts, which were regimented in two- and three-rota systems. The night economy has constantly expanded since the late 19th century, with nocturnalisation in larger cities like London, Paris and Berlin contributing to an increase in nightlife in Europe. At the turn of the 20th century, night work accelerated at an unprecedented speed because of the rapid development of services that were not part of the night economy before, argues Leon Kreitzman in the book 24-hour Society. For example, the expansion of call centres and information technologies have subsequently led to the growth of adjacent services open around-the-clock, such as petrol stations, night sandwich bars, and the classic kebab shops feeding the clubbers enjoying nightlife. This development has further shaped the growing need for and reliance on migrant night shifters. Unlike in the previous centuries, migrants have become the backbone of the 21st century global cities. Due to the rapid development of the digital age, Sassen argues that the Global City of the 21st century is a transnational space and an attractive hub for financial centres transferring the world’s reserves in seconds beyond national borders. The 24-hour cities, like London, have become financial centres for corporations that transcend the national borders, thus attracting both foreign institutions to invest and migrant workers to travel to and to live and work in. Sassen adds that the global city has become the battleground for occupational discrepancy between white and blue collar workers. The investors and hedge fund executives are the high earners with excessive bonuses, whilst the workers providing the muscles to support the world’s financial hub, the service industries, transport, police, and ambulance, work on shift-rota with low wages. These wages are in fact so low that they need to juggle two jobs at the same time to make ends meet. These, mostly British, night shift workers, are...
Will Norman’s “graveyard shifters”. Norman’s account is the only ethnographic study on night work in Britain. He reports that across all industries and services, 1.5 million British workers work night shifts in the UK – the equivalent of 8.3% of its total workforce. Though Norman’s ethnographic study offers insight into the hardships of British graveyard shifters, it does not provide a complete picture of the social fabric of night shift work in global cities like London. In other words, the migrant workforce meets the “labour and skills needs” that the employers demand, but cannot be found among the domestic supply of labourers. In short, millions of migrants are doing the “graveyard shift” in higher income countries and in the global cities in particular. Yet they seem invisible in the small and growing literature in the social sciences. It is even more puzzling that night shift work is a regular part of everyday life and the driving force behind London’s rapidly expanding night economy. Still, the issues of precarity in the night economy are hardly debated in the Houses of Parliament, by the public or in the media. Moreover, the 24-hour services mentioned earlier rely on the food industry and London’s markets, which have been catering to Londoners’ incessant appetite for food and exotic fruits and vegetables for centuries. Old Spitalfields market, for example, has been trading to grocers all over London for hundreds of years. It once belonged to the City of London’s square mile, but it was relocated to a 31-acre site in East London, colloquially known as ‘the marshes’. The City of London Corporation, its owner and manager, has adapted to market demands and transformed the Old Spitalfields into the New Spitalfields, a hub for exotic fruit and vegetable trade with an annual turnover of 650 tonnes of produce coming from and going to all corners of the world and supplying London’s and UK’s incessant appetite for fresh food. In the 100+ stands operating on the market site, there are over 1,000+ night shift workers muscling fruits and vegetables, night-in and night-out six nights a week all year-round. Hundreds of those night shift workers are migrants and come from places as far as the Far East and as close as continental Europe, for example from Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey. Within the broader concept of night economy expansion, this thesis investigates precisely this migrant segment inhabiting the social fabric of the night shift work.

This paper seeks to clarify the concept of solidarity, which was previously employed to explain social cohesion. In so doing, the study testing the use of this concept in an effort to assess, formulate, and propose the opposite - that the corrosion of capabilities for sociability and solidarity is more prevalent amongst night workers. At this stage, I do not present results of my own research, but rather aim to stimulate further theoretical enquiries on the topic of corrosion of solidarity as opposed to social cohesion amongst the burdened class, otherwise called The Precariat.

For this purpose, I first examine past contributions explaining how the global transition from circadian to post-circadian capitalism have impacted on the subjectivities of migrant workers. The content of this article is part of the author’s PhD research: A Theoretical Proposition for Corrosion of Solidarity Amongst Migrant Night Shift Workers in Global Cities. The longer version of this article was written with the financial support of Centre for Policy Studies | Central European University, as part of the Working Paper Series 2017. The author is grateful for the permission given by the Centre for Policy Studies for further use in this shorter format. The longer version will be available at http://bit.ly/cpswps in the Spring issue.
night workers surviving precarity in global cities. Implicitly, I will explore the triadic relationship between intensification of labour, time regimentation and locality, which are crucial for understanding the transition from wealth accumulation to ‘world-making’ capitalism, while addressing the conditions, mechanisms and processes that have led to:

- The expansion of the working day into the night, which transformed capitalism from a circadian phase to a post-circadian capitalist age that disrespects the 24-hour rhythm – awake/sleep/relax;
- Major alterations over time to our perception of time and time regimentation, which have transformed the metropolitan workers’ capabilities for sociability;
- The nocturnal, global city, providing the space and the expendable work force for the advancement of capitalism.

Having established the triadic relationship between night work, the special importance of time in making new spaces for capital, and the nurturing ground that global cities provide for ‘occupational polarisation’ and precariousness, this paper will proceed by demonstrating the ways in which the march of the post-circadian capitalism corrodes the character of night workers and therefore undermines the capabilities for sociability and solidarity among the precariat. In supporting this view, I invite scholars from globalisation studies focusing on different groups of people to this interdisciplinary discussion. These may be scholars dealing with The Precariat, migrants’ living and working precariously in The Global City; political economy anthropologists explaining the precise conditions and mechanisms, and the capitalist moment whereby the global transformation, has been moving from ‘abstract wealth’ to ‘world-making capitalism’. They also may be sociologists explaining the impact that the ‘new economy’ has on the ‘corrosion of character’ of workers or psychologists such as Ron Roberts. He establishes a radical basis for an understanding of the human wrongs carried out by the ‘two bedfellows’, Psychology and Capitalism, which manipulate the minds of people and implicitly move the human condition towards a ‘future of an illusion’ where humans are transformed into ‘zombies’, e.g. purely material objects commodified according to current political economic interests.

The paradox is that the armies of night workers, part of the ‘migrant infantry of capitalism’ maintaining the global cities, live with respect to the demands of 24-hour societies and with disrespect to their own 24-hour physiological clock. They work precariously and experience the 4As (anomie, anxiety, anger, and alienation) due to exhaustion, sleeplessness, and isolation. In what follows, I provide a road map to the processes that have led to a transition from circadian to post-circadian capitalism.

Transition from Circadian to Post-Circadian Capitalism

Even a cursory examination of the contemporary work of scholars in the field of transnational spaces reveals that time – that is time zones, time regimentation and by implication changes in the perception of time – has been neglected by these scholars. Whilst this remains subject to further investigation, it is my contention that this is not the time to prove or disprove fully how this neglect has taken place. However, Standing\(^{13}\) employs temporality as a tool in understanding the processes behind the global transformation and the ways in which they condition our lives. Beginning with the conditions that existed in agrarian and later created for an industrialised society and through to global market society geared towards service industries and consuming, he insists that this ‘new time’ or ‘tertiary time’ fits a ‘tertiary society’ (the flexible-labour society) mainly built from the precariat. Hence ‘we need to find a way of looking at how we allocate time that is suitable to this people. The industrial or agrarian time does not fit their lives.’ The days when time was spent in blocks of years spent at school, followed by the working life sliced into 10-12 hours shifts, after which we came home and socialized. And if we were lucky, we could retire early. Those days are behind us.

Historian E.P. Thomson chronicled that ‘the nascent proletariat was disciplined by the clock’\(^{14}\). Moreover, sociologist George Simmel explained that the minds of metropolitans were controlled by a calculating order ruling their social relationships according to the new ‘character of calculability’\(^{15}\). Up to this point, time regimentation meant that the old ways in which time was operating, e.g. the blocks of time, school, work, pension (if one was lucky), were replaced by the new terms of flexible and short-term work. There was no such thing as ‘the long term’ anymore.

Time regimentation has changed our perception of time. Sennett\(^{16}\) explains how this happened as a result of the ‘new economy’. His book on the consequences of the new economy on the character of people, seems more relevant now than it perhaps was at the end of the 20th century. Sennett celebrates the works of previous thinkers by pinpointing to where the new ways of organising time, particularly working time, was leading – i.e., to the flexible working time or “no long-term’ of the ‘new economy’ era. By implication, being flexible means that as a worker or consultant you need to arrange your working life around others whom your work depends on. Further, he argues, parameters such as work-home, 9-5, weekdays and weekends, have been replaced with working from home, as-and-when-catching-employment, working by the piece, and not by long-term contract.

Weather a consultant or a low-skilled worker, everybody is expected to simultaneously fulfil the needs of the world-making/wealth-creating capitalism at very short notice and till further notice. In short, ‘no long-term’ and flexible time have been intruding the social, physical, emotional and psychological realms of our working lives and, by extension, our personal lives. Differences exist, however, in that a consultant may be able to buy solutions to escape the time-squeeze, but low-skilled workers merely survive and remain unable to keep up.

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\(^{14}\) Ibid, 115


The specifics are new, and the important point is that they are not anticipated by Weber’s ‘abstract wealth’. Abstract wealth does not make news spaces of capital. Abstract wealth is not by itself world-making. Only capitalism is.\(^{20}\)

For Kalb, a global systems anthropologist, the specifics of the capitalist ‘moment’ are immensely important. From the moment when the Dutch elite navy sponsored by the burghers of City of Amsterdam with some support from the English invaded the British Isles, the Dutch established the Bank of England and financed it for the next two hundred years.\(^{21}\) An alliance was forged with a vast amount of wealth and state power, which has fostered the creation of world empires under the flagship of what is known today as Great Britain. Thus, new spaces of capital accumulation were formed and a new age of living with disrespect to the circadian time distribution awake/sleep/relax was changed forever, and imposed by the capitalists concerned with wealth accumulation onto workers across the globe, within and without the old core capital societies like the Dutch and the British.

The imposition of the transition from a circadian capitalist era upon the ‘capitalist moment’ of course does not imply that all the consequences of today’s post-circadian capitalism are rooted in that moment. It also does not stand as the only explanation or imply that capitalism developed after 1688 as a result of


that alliance. For our purposes, it is not necessary to consider every theory there on the evolution of modern capitalism as capitalist ‘creative destruction’. However, we are interested how it was inherited in order to put this analysis on solid grounds.

Embedded in the Marxian thought, anthropological political economy describes society as divided into two spheres of production and consumption (or at best three: production, distribution, and exchange). Karl Marx uses modes of production (MoP) to analyse and describe the antagonistic relationship between those ‘who command the labour of those who do not’, i.e. the 1% of capitalists commanding the 99% of workers (actual or potential) in the interest of multiply capital – creating money with money.

From a Marxian perspective, the stratified capitalist society is engaged in the creation of wealth and power through a surplus extracted to the detriment of the ‘burdened class’, leading an existence of survival. Surplus value is made by corporations by way of paying wage-labourers less ‘than the value their labour generates’. Labour disciplining and fragmentation are tools of the capitalist system, affecting anyone living in this socially stratified society by means of production. These tools employed according to the capitalist ethos to divide capitalists from their workers, and the upper-middle class from immigrants or mainstream society from its peripheral population, with the latter being the force that keeps the flame of the global cities (e.g. London, New York) burning around-the-clock. Fragmentation or division is the salient feature of capitalism. Divisions exist between domestic and economic spheres, producers and the exploited, as well as makers and consumers. Consequently, owners of means of production are separated from workers; workers are alienated from the production and creation process; peripheral or societies (nurturing highly skilled professionals) are divided from core societies which select the professionals according to their market’s needs. Ultimately, Marx viewed both the workers (exploited) and capitalists (exploiters) as alienated from their own humanity, with alienation occurring in a variety of forms.

David Graeber\(^{23}\) discusses the Possibilities for this alienation. He is an outspoken, public intellectual, activist, anthropologist, and “a lifelong hater of corporate smoke and mirrors, who coined the (Occupy Wall Street) movement’s ingenious slogan, ‘We are the 99%’”\(^{24}\) and who contrasts the capitalist with non-capitalist society. He argues that the latter focuses on the self-realisation of human beings, whereby the object of production is not the end result (e.g. wealth), rather the creation of social relations amongst people (55). Therefore, the onus is on actions and processes by which people shape one another (from poetry to planting onions) and they are: a) motivated by meanings (ideas) and b) proceed through a concrete medium (material). In contrast, the system of capitalist societies produces wealth and concomitantly alienates the workers from their labour. Capitalists produce and consume commodities, and not useful and meaningful products. Therefore, there is no need for corporations to provide creative activities so that workers socialise and invest in the workers’ self-development, especially when technology is advancing so rapidly and can produce and make more profit for corporations vis-a-vis human costs.

So far, Graeber’s distinction focuses on the owners of means of production are separated from workers; workers are alienated from the production and creation process; peripheral or societies (nurturing highly skilled professionals) are divided from core societies which select the professionals according to their market’s needs. Ultimately, Marx viewed both the workers (exploited) and capitalists (exploiters) as alienated from their own humanity, with alienation occurring in a variety of forms.\(^{23}\)


way capitalists and non-capitalists see their interests vis-à-vis the human condition. In Possibilities Graeber also delves into the growth of capital through expansion. For our purposes it is not necessary to consider all aspects of Graeber’s thought on capital accumulation. Rather, we need to narrow down his eloquent and extensive writings to the most pertinent points to frame this proposition, namely that the advancement of capitalism has been accelerating through the expansion from around 17th century or since Don Kalb’s ‘capitalist moment’. Graeber sees ‘capital (a)s a living entity, which constantly seeks to expand – expansion is the key to survival for capitalist firms.’ Capitalism, Graeber says, ‘is not a state of mind but a matter of objective structures, which allow wealth and power to be translated into abstract forms in which they can be endlessly expanded and reproduced.’ In Debt, Graeber challenges familiar thinking on modern capitalism. As he eloquently chronicles, it goes before ‘the rise of factories (with their workers) and wage labour’, and the wealth accumulated though the surplus value extracted from workers’ labour minus wages. Graeber says modern capitalism, or the ‘new economy’ and more pertinently ‘world-making capitalism’ is a ‘financial apparatus … - central banks, bond markets, short-selling, brokerage houses, speculative bubbles, securization, annuities’, ‘a system that demands constant, endless growth’, which ‘from our baseline date of 1700 … the dawn of modern capitalism … that pump(s) more and more labour out of just about everyone with whom it comes in contact …’. To Kalb, 1688 is the precise capitalist moment when abstract wealth capitalism permuted into ‘world-making’ capitalism, with the specific property of creating new spaces for capital.

A closer analysis of this moment reveals that the transition from the Weberian type of ‘abstract wealth’ to ‘world-making’ capitalism facilitated the creation of a ‘creative destruction’ type of capitalism. It is no longer just a system for sending vast amounts of money to the core, but a ‘world-making capitalism’, backed by a powerful combination of money capital and state power. This capitalism functions under certain conditions of ‘social, institutional, and geographic power relations’ in order to create the new spaces of capital endlessly. The mechanisms described by Harvey as facilitating/aiding the new conditions that Kalb insists that makes the difference

25 Ibid.
27 Ibid., p. 345.
between the two types of capitalism are com-
modification, multiplication or intensification
of labour power. The ‘precise conditions by
which those large amounts of money capital
return to the core over a protracted period’ 39,
i.e. time regimentation as one mechanism be-
hind the expansion of incessant production in
the night spaces in order to create new spaces
for capital, explain, in part, what pushes work-
ers into precarity in this age of ‘post- circadian
capitalism’ 40.

So far, we have analysed the two critical com-
ponents in the analysis of the transition from
circadian to post-circadian capitalism, inten-
sification of labour and time regimentation.
Next we turn to the third, the global city as
the nurturing ground for creating new spaces
for capital accumulation into the night. Lon-
don is the ‘global city’ located in Europe,
which makes it unique. And as far as Sassen
is concerned, it is the very location where the
‘place-bound labour market for talent [meets]
low-wage workers’. Further, she argues that
sites like London (and New York) offer the
cross-border spaces for recapturing the fi-
nancial sub-culture, on the one hand, and the
needed economic geography of place, on the
other. Both are ‘involved in globalisation [that]
allows us to recapture people, workers, com-
munities, and more specifically, the many dif-
ferent work cultures, besides the corporate
culture, involved in the work of globalisation’.

39 Kalb, D. (2013). Financialization and the
Capitalist Moment: Marx versus Weber in the Anthro-
pology of Global Systems. American Ethnologist, 40(2),
258-266.

The Increase of Night Work in the Post-Cir-
cadian 24-Hour City

Who Are the Migrant Night Workers? Who
Needs Them?

Employer demand for migrant workers has be-
come a key feature of labour markets in high in-
come countries. Employers’ calls for more migrant
workers are typically expressed in terms of ‘labour
and skill needs’ that cannot be met from within the
domestic labour force. 41

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) includes night
shifts in the normal course of shift work. The
working regulations recommend the length of
night shifts to be seven hours, starting between
6pm and 12am, but no less than 3 hours and
no more than 8 hours within a 24-hour period
in a 17-week rolling period 42. The night work-
ers performing ‘hazardous or heavy physical
or mental strains’ have an ‘absolute limit’ of 8
hour shifts 43. Descriptions based on the UK’s
Labour Force Survey (LFS) data have limita-
tions in that they underestimate the number of
migrant workers. However, relying on what is
available, the Migrant Observatory reported
6.6 million foreign-born workers in the UK
labour market in 2014. 44 Thirty-six per cent
of these were working as employees and 48%
as self-employed and lived in London. Of the
low-skilled work sectors, the industries with
the highest intake of foreign-born migrants
were food manufacturing (38%), residential
and domestic work (32%), and make-up fac-
tories (29%). From 1999 to 2009 the number of

39 Kalb, D. (2013). Financialization and the
Capitalist Moment: Marx versus Weber in the Anthro-
poly of Global Systems. American Ethnologist, 40(2),
258-266.

needs migrant workers? Labour Shortages, Immigration,
42 Unite the Union (2013). Shift Work and Night
Work: A Health and Safety Issue for Unite Members
43 Ibid., p. 16.
44 Migration Observatory Briefing (2015). COMPAS,
University of Oxford.
UK-nationals working nights has decreased from 10% to 8.3% (ONS-2, 2011).

Will Norman (2011) shows in his ethnographic study that nearly 1.5M British males and females are working on various night shift patterns: permanent nights, rotating night shifts – (early/late/night) and continental shifts nights and days (LFS, July 2008). His respondents refused to give exact details as they were either working a second job at night or informally. Undoubtedly, if all people working day shifts declared their second jobs during the evenings and nights, it is estimated that these figures could double. Gaps and limitations in the data increase when one attempts to offer an overview of the migrant population on night shifts. The Labour Force Survey does not include students living in residents’ halls, many of whom are migrants themselves working to pay the high UK tuition fees. Therefore, there are no conclusive figures on the number of migrant night workers in the UK, but he following trends illustrate that the need for migrant night workers in the US and Japan has been growing for many decades. For example in the US, ‘which in many ways leads the way into the 24 hour world’, the number of people working on ‘alternative shifts’ in the evenings or nights increased from 7 million in 1987 to 15 million in 2008. In 2005, there were nearly 250,000 night workers in New York City alone, which represented 7% of the city’s 3.3 million workers. Sharman and Sharman published these findings in Nightshifts NYC in 2008 and argued that the fabric of modern society has changed since Melbin’s study 25 years ago. Rather recent research in Japan shows that the number of night workers among Japanese employees rose from 13.3% in 1997 to 21.8% in 2012.

Moreover, evenings or unsociable hours of working and night-time work have been part of many industries and services, such as the computer sector, transport, communication, fire brigades, police, the army, and hospitals. Industrialisation (and the heavy mechanical and chemical processes) and artificial lighting have contributed to an increase of the night life or ‘nocturnalization’ of the emerging nocturnal cities. Furthermore, in view of international competition in manufacturing, night work complemented the round-the-clock shift system to ‘maintain the long operating hours ... and the same level of capital utilisation of machinery’. The production systems of the late 20th century added night shifts to the already established two- and three-shift systems, mainly in manufacturing. The expansion of the global economy at the start of the 21st century brought something new. It increased the need to work night shifts in sectors that were never part of the night economy of global cities. Particularly noteworthy are information and knowledge centres, banking, stock trading and call centres, some of which are open 24/7 and 365 days a year and have consequently pushed for expansion of other services such as supermarkets, petrol stations and night bus networks. The aggressive expansion of food store chains in the US and the UK is a useful illustration. Since 1978, the working hours in 82% of 6,599 ‘Seven-11’ food stores had been extended beyond the 7am to 11pm, thus extending through the night. In Britain, just before Christmas of 1998, the Tesco supermarket chain surprised its competitors by opening selected stores throughout the night.


The increased use of night work has stretched the possibilities and resources of night works, both in mind and body, to levels unseen before in human history and prior to the capitalist expansion. The efforts of capitalists to exploit workers’ labour around the clock significantly contributed to the emergence of the nocturnal cities. This is eloquently captured by Mezzadra and Neilson:


The prolongation of the working day beyond the limits of the natural day, into the night, acts only as a palliative. But, as it is physically impossible to exploit the same individual labour power constantly during the night as well as the day, to overcome this physical hindrance, an alternative becomes necessary between those working people whose power are exhausted by day and those who are used up at night.

So far, one observation is that migrants are an easy target for supplying their unlimited low-cost labour. Alarmingly, factors such as the British labour market’s ‘growing dependence on migrant workers’ and the global economic deterioration (in host/ sending countries) resulting in fewer incentives for migrants to return to their countries lead to an increase in number of migrant workers in the UK economy, in low paid private sectors, and under minimal, precarious conditions. This holds even more for the case of growing precariat in the night work sectors.


Standing’s Precariat is the definition for a disappearing proletariat and an increase of precarious conditions of workers in relation to capital and state. Standing’s work contributes to the theoretical body of knowledge of Bourdieau (who articulated precarity to describe temporary or seasonal workers) and others to indicate some kind of precariousness. He points out that Weber’s notions of class and status could not apply to the precariat because it is a class-in-itself, and in-the-making, in short, it is a class of its own which does not yet have a common identity because ‘tensions within the precariat are setting people against each other’ as opposed to being solidaire with each other. The educated migrants holding a degree find themselves at the low end of the labour markets without access to social mobility. They therefore feel frustrated for being deprived of a meaningful life, and consequently seething resentment and anger against the celebrity culture and material success experienced by the few. More pertinent to our discussion, the angry precariat resents the life that ‘short-termism’ or flexi-jobs result in, its insecurities and ‘no construction of trusting relationships built up in meaningful structures or networks’. Born out of despair, anomie sets in, as Emile Durkheim explains, ‘a feeling of
passivity’. It is the result of sustained defeat, a negative feeling experienced by many in precarious situations, especially when they are labelled as ‘undeserving, socially irresponsible’, or worse, lazy. These people often lack a deserving place in society and fixed status and thus often live in despair. This results in anxiety-ridden behaviour, insecurity about the future and alienation from today’s bread-and-butter jobs which they hold on short-term basis. In short, the people are expected to be ever more adaptable in a flexible market, which is enough to make anyone prone to the four As – alienated, anomic, anxious and angry. In short, we should disabuse ourselves from the illusions that a short-termist society has something positive to offer to locals born and educated in their own country, and even more so for the migrants. The next section provides a discussion on the effects and imminent problems faced by migrant night workers suffering from ‘sleep despoliation’, ‘drifting’, and regimentation of time.

Becoming the ‘Zombie’ Night Worker

Contemporary capitalist society requires what Johnathan Crary\(^52\) has identified as the despoliation of sleep in the interests of maximizing the individual’s potential – as both a producer and consumer – for generating profit\(^53\). This night-to-night reality of the nocturnal cities of the future includes divisions of invisible night workers, ‘travelling at night’ rather than travelling through the night. Constantly fighting sleeplessness whilst awake and working, enduring the bodily exhaustion that is produced by pro-longed physical labour, and the mental alienation from isolation by being cut-off from diurnals’ minds and eyes and the social bonds they had before nightshifting invaded their nights, makes of night workers an army losing battles with the precariousness of their nocturnal working lives and sleepless days. Rather strikingly, Standing\(^54\) argues that with the globalised era setting in, the new dawn of the ‘post-circadian capitalism’\(^55\) has placed its high demands on humanity. Namely, it is no longer the case that ‘early birds catch the worm’, rather the sleepless ones. Murray Melbin’s\(^56\) sociological analysis of the developments of the 24-hour night-time economies – of production and consumption – in the US concluded that ‘if incessancy develops in the workplace, it will soon invade workers’ bodies and households’. The time predicted by Melbin has arrived, and recently, art critic and theorist John Crary,\(^57\) ‘24/7’ depicted the

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\(^57\) Crary, J. (2013). 24/7: Late Capitalism and the
time we live in as the despoliation of sleep. However, unlike the ‘burdened class’ whom Kreitzman described as the segment of population living in The 24 Hour Society\textsuperscript{58}, highly paid corporate executives have the power to buy solutions to avoid battling sleeplessness. Kreitzman is also argues that the difficulties of night workers have been growing for many decades now. He gives examples of the most disastrous accidents of the late 20th century that happened at night when the night workers are more likely to be exhausted, unable to concentrate, and exposed to various risks, not just in the work place but also on their return journeys between home and work. The research division funded by the Pentagon, where scientists deprive human fellow participants of sleep and expose them to ‘experiment trials of sleeplessness techniques, including neurochemicals, gene therapy, and transcranial magnetic simulation’\textsuperscript{59} may provide sooner rather than later an antidote to fatigue by ‘reducing the body’s need for sleep’ in the post-circadian capitalism. Nevertheless, future bio-automatons and bio-machines do not need to co-operate, support each other or show solidarity to one another! Besides, zombies, the nocturnal workers look and behave like diurnal creatures. In fact they are indistinguishable from normal human beings. As articulated by psychologist Ron Roberts, an alienated mind is an ‘individual separated from self, other, his/her work’ and any control over his predicament:

‘Eliminated from the subject matter of the behavioural sciences, the person as a centre of experience has been supplanted by the ‘zombie’, celebrated by philosopher Dan Dennett as “behaviourally indistinguishable” from a “normal human being”.\textsuperscript{60}

Corrosion of Solidarity: A Proposition

We can now rephrase solidarity. This paper set an alternative basis for understanding that there are limits to solidarity as a concept previously used to explain social cohesion amongst workers. Also, when they experience migrant slavery, night shifters choose consciously or subconsciously not to show solidarity to one another, choosing small-scale conflict instead.

On this battle ground, ‘set by thriving polarised employment present in global cities’61, migrants vie against one another for under-minimum wage jobs62. Instability becomes the normality. ‘No long term’ becomes the norm in a society where loose bonds are ubiquitous, i.e. no commitment and trust in relationships (e.g. divorces).63 Sennett’s investigation adds to the puzzle. Enrico’s portray, once a migrant himself, rearing Rico, his American-born son, resembles the incarnation of some past legacies.

‘Enrico had a somewhat fatalistic, old-world sense of people being born into a particular class or condition of life and making very best of what is possible within those constraints. Events beyond his control, like layoffs, happened to him; then he coped’.64

This passage offers an entry point into the matrix behind Enrico’s character. His character may be the indication of a ‘non-drift’ attitude that kept him and his wife on track to make a better life for his son, Rico. One generation later, Enrico’s son, lives in a paradox. Rico is both a successful and lost man due to the flexibility with which he approaches the demands of work at the cost of ‘weakening his own character in ways for which there is no practical remedy’. Although a successful entrepreneur, uncertainty creeps in because without any ‘looming historical disaster’, Rico is one of the ‘ideal Everyman’ who is not ‘reckoning the consequences of change or not knowing what comes next’ because ‘creative destruction’ as Schumpeter said, is not happening on a Richter magnitude, but it is woven into the everyday practices of a vigorous capitalism’, which requires people at ease with that. As advocated by Harvard Business School guru, Hohn Kotter, ‘consulting rather than becoming ‘entangled’ in long-term employment; institutional loyalty is a trap in an economy where ‘business’ concepts, product designs, competitor intelligence, capital equipment, and kinds of knowledge have shorter credible life spans65.

Moreover, the ‘short-term society’ model of ‘weak ties vs. strong ties’ no longer works in today’s ‘teamwork’ based environment. Mark Granovetter’s66 ‘international networking’ model shows that ‘absent ties’, a term for ‘weak ties’, create superficial relationships that provide networkers with no social security due to short-term and objective-based type of ‘friendships’ or collaboration. Lewis Coser67 argues that ‘shared values’ based on solidarity create ‘weak ties’ and short-term relationships between the workers and communities. He argues that verbal conflict instead creates

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durable relationships of friendship and progress by revealing differences amongst group members, thus consolidating ‘strong ties’, that is stronger, longer-term types of networking and bonds when people openly confront one another over disagreements rather than showing solidarity during a set project led period. The argument presented here offers an alternative to an understanding of the underlying mechanisms and techniques of a marching world-making capitalism, which dismantles around-the-clock the livelihoods of night workers living and working in the nocturnal cities of the future. To live in a post-circadian capitalist age means to appreciate first and foremost the way in which living in a global market society is affecting our sense of time. Hence this explains the importance that time-squeeze plays in disguising that. When post-circadian time intersects with the 24-h society, people live at an unprecedented speed, and with disrespect to their biological clock and leisure time. It is at this critical junction where the corrosion of solidarity takes place amongst a mass of people, the growing class or precariat, concentrated in the global, nocturnal cities. It is my contention that solidarity does not exist amongst the cohorts and armies of the precariat. Quite the opposite and more so than in other groups of people, there is a rather fierce competition and non-solidarity than there is social cohesion amongst those living and working in precarious conditions. The solidarity model crumbled when it came to explaining cohesion amongst the burdened ones living with anomie, anxiety, anger and alienation.

In closing, I draw on Sennett’s perspective on the personal consequences, among which Corrosion of Character of Individuals. He illustrates that the ‘ideal Everyman’ of the new economy is not ‘reckoning the consequences of change or does not know what comes next’ because ‘creative destruction’, as Schumpeter said, is not happening on a Richter magnitude, but it is woven into the everyday practices of a vigorous capitalism’. Sennett’s only ‘ideal’ worker in the unequal global city of London that can fathom such bleak uncertainty is the wealth management corporate-executive on high pay to quadruple the 1%’s wealth and their incessant appetite for consumption. At the other end, there is the army of workers, the 99%, slaved for incessant production (and consumption).

Constantly defeated and frustrated, the people consequently are seething resentment and anger against the celebrity culture and material success experienced by the few. The angry precariat resents the life that ‘short-termism’ or flexi-jobs bring with it, its insecurities and ‘no construction of trusting relationships built up in meaningful structures or networks’. Put differently, we should disabuse ourselves (to borrow a phrase from Noam Chomsky) from living the illusions that a short-term society provides and nurture any possibility of solidarity amongst night workers.

To think on these lines, would mean to dream of a ‘future of illusions’ where today’s alienated individual, diurnal and nocturnal alike is other than a material object for both, production and consumption, consummates and consumers.


69 See Boym, S. (2010) for an extended discussion, following Arendt, of freedom as the miracle of the ‘infinitely probable’. A reality which though infinitely improbable occurs regularly and publicly.
About the Author
He is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Fellow and PhD Candidate in Social Anthropology at CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY, Budapest. Macarie’s PhD thesis investigates the capabilities for solidarity amongst precarious migrant night workers in the New Spitalfields market – London’s largest fruit and vegetable market. The research adopts an innovative nocturnal ethnographic strategy to capture the sizable segment of denizens up and working at night in the global cities. Macarie co-directed the Invisible Lives of Romanian Night Workers in London (Production: UK, June 2013). His next short film, The Sleepless Bat is due for release in theaters in 2017/18.

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